Today's
The Herald-Palladium
included inside

SMC begins fundraising effort to name new wrestling facility

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Dowagiac News

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Cass Co. Board of Commissioners OK's 2026 committee assignments

SUBMITTED

CASS COUNTY — The Cass County Board of Commissioners approved committee, board and commission assignments for the 2026 calendar year at its regular meeting Thursday.

Each commissioner will serve on at least one standing committee and at least one board or commission. Standing committees are comprised of County commissioners, elected officials and County employees, and are designed to review and discuss board business before action is discussed by a committee of the whole.

Standing committee assignments are as follows:

■ Appointments Committee: Tom Langley (District 1), Jim Lawrence (District 2), Sam Barrera (District 6)

■ Capital Project Committee: Sam Barrera, Roseann Marchetti (District 7)

■ Policy Committee: Alan Northrop (District 3), Michael Grice (District 5), Roseann Marchetti, RJ Lee (District 8)

■ Salary Committee: Tom Langley, Alan Northrop (District 3), Jeremiah Jones, RJ Lee

■ Surplus Property Committee: Sam Barrera, Roseann Marchetti, RJ Lee

■ Descriptions of each standing committee can be found at casscountymi.org/BOC-Committees.

■ County commissioners also represent Cass County on many regional boards and commissions which impact Cass County residents.

See **ASSIGNMENTS**, page A4

Photo provided

The Cass County Board of Commissioners approved committee, board and commission assignments for the 2026 calendar year at its regular meeting Thursday.

Dowagiac council OK's lead service line grant agreement, engineering services

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

DOWAGIAC — The City of Dowagiac continues making progress in its plan to replace lead service lines throughout the community.

The Dowagiac City Council approved two items related to the City's FY 2026 Lead Service Line Replacement project on North Front Street, which is fully funded through the previously awarded Small, Underserved, and Disadvantaged Communities grant administered by EGLE. The project calls for the replacement of approximately 78 lead service lines and removal of an additional 37 inactive lead service lines with an anticipated completion in summer 2027.

The council authorized the execution of the $838,183 SUDC grant agreement and approved a professional services agreement with Prein&Newhof for engineering design, bidding and construction phase services.

The engineering services include project design, preparation of bid documents, contractor selection support, construction observation, grant compliance assistance and project closeout, at a not-to-exceed cost of $120,000 funded within the grant budget. With both items approved, the city can now proceed with project implementation, meet EGLE reporting and compliance requirements, and maintain the overall grant schedule.

In other business, the council voted to allow the city staff to contract with an economic development professional for services.

Council documents state that staff have been reviewing ways to add to the city's economic development efforts. Currently, city staff and Market One are providing those development services with several success stories while additional emphasis can be given through bringing in additional

See **COUNCIL**, page A6

Maxwell Harden / Leader Publications

Mya Vazquez was crowned Miss Dowagiac 2026.

A royal reign | Mya Vazquez crowned Miss Dowagiac 2026

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

DOWAGIAC — For Mya Vazquez, the Miss Dowagiac Scholarship Pageant felt like a dream.

The Dowagiac senior was crowned Miss Dowagiac 2026 Saturday night as the pageant celebrated 85 years. What felt like a dream became a reality the next morning when Vazquez woke up to see her sparkling Miss Dowagiac crown.

"Honestly, it felt like I was still in a dream," Vazquez said. "It was just waking up and just being grateful over again. It's an honor; I'm glad if I could be doing this with anyone, it would be with these ladies."

Emcee'd by Jeremy Truitt and Miss Dowagiac 2015 Tori Warsko, the pageant featured 11 contestants who were judged based on personal interviews and pageant night presentation skills including platform speeches. The pageant production also featured a performance by dancers from Miss Michelle & Co. Joining Vazquez in her court of honor is first runner-up Johannah McDonald, second runner-up Haley Henry and Miss Congeniality Aaliyah Northrop.

Vazquez, 17, is the daughter of Hector and Jennifer Vazquez. She has three siblings: Hector Jr., Mateo and

See **REIGN**, page A6

Amelia Bakeman crowns Mya Vazquez as Miss Dowagiac 2026 as finalists Isabella Razo (second from right) and Marlie Carpenter (far right) react.

2026 Miss Dowagiac court is ready to represent the community

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

DOWAGIAC — Four Dowagiac teens will be representing their community throughout the year as members of the 2026 Miss Dowagiac Court of Honor.

Mya Vazquez was crowned Miss Dowagiac 2026 Saturday, Jan. 24. Joining Vazquez in her court of honor is first runner-up Johannah McDonald, second runner-up Haley Henry and Miss Congeniality Aaliyah Northrop.

Johannah, 17, is the daughter of Justin and Melissa McDonald and has two brothers. She is a senior at Dowagiac Union and is dual-enrolled at Southwestern Michigan College. McDonald is on the varsity football and varsity soccer teams and is a member of the National Honor Society and Rotary Interact Club. Outside of school, she participates in club soccer and 4-H. McDonald will attend Goshen College after graduation to further her

See **COURT**, page A4

The 2026 Miss Dowagiac Court of Honor. From left: First Runner-Up Johannah McDonald, Miss Dowagiac Mya Vazquez, Second Runner-Up Haley Henry, Miss Congeniality Aaliyah Northrop.

Maxwell Harden / Leader Publications

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Marie Majerek
James Edward Scott III
Norbert Allen Shembarger
Lorna Suits
Karen Edna Mae Tolliver
Edward Villalba
Patricia Wiggins
Christine Marie Wise

hp FOCUS
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Inside today's Herald-Palladium

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FRANKLY

Tips and quips

What is Frankly? It is where readers sound off on issues of the day. Have a tip or a quip? Call Frankly at 269-687-7700 or email rich.cains@leaderpub.com.

■ Americans should no longer tolerate the illegal search and seizures taking place.

■ I never thought I'd live in an America where people have to carry "papers" and show them at every corner.

■ Congratulations to all participants of the Miss Dowagiac Scholarship Pageant.

■ Amazing the things that change in our history; one moment we honor it and in the next it is offensive.

■ Everyone who has gone to Dowagiac has been proud to be a Chieftain. Please don't take that pride away.

■ One year since DJT took office. It feels like ten. It will take decades, if ever, for the USA and the world to recover from the chaos and destruction caused by this extremely irrational man and his enablers. Russia and China are taking a victory lap.

■ Biden should be in jail for allowing murderers in our country.

■ Trump could cure cancer and Democrats would find something wrong with it.

■ Have you seen Niles High School Athletics' new broadcast team? They do a great job!

■ If you aren't watching, listening or reading about our constitutional rights being taken from us, shame on you. Doors on homes being blown off their hinges, people dragged from their cars, protestors murdered and no investigations are taking place. This is ignoring our Bill of Rights.

■ Why aren't ALL members of Congress speaking out against the terror being inflicted on citizens of the United States? I guess some of them must be afraid.

Annual playwright's festival celebrates southwest Michigan's theatre talent

SUBMITTED

Photo provided

The Beckwith Theatre Company kicks off its season on Feb. 6-7 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 8 at 2 p.m., with its Local Playwright Festival, a dynamic showcase of original 10-minute plays written, directed and performed entirely by regional artists.

DOWAGIAC — The Beckwith Theatre Company kicks off its season with the return of its Local Playwright Festival, a dynamic showcase of original 10-minute plays written, directed and performed entirely by regional artists.

The festival runs Feb. 6-7 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 8 at 2 p.m. Back by popular demand after a successful inaugural year, the festival highlights the remarkable creativity and storytelling power of the Southwest Michigan theatre community. Nine original works – ranging from thought-provoking drama to laugh-out-loud comedy – will be brought to life in a fast-paced evening of theatre that offers something for every audience member.

"This festival is a celebration of the incredible talent we have right here in our community," said Jennifer Shoemaker, President of the Beckwith Theatre Board of Directors. "From the playwrights who crafted these stories to the directors and actors who bring them to the stage, every element of this production is homegrown. It's a testament to the vitality of regional theatre" commented Larry Nielsen, Founder of the festival.

The 2026 lineup features works from local playwrights including Linda LaRocque, Kristen Robinson, Dennis W. Feece, Michael E. Cafferky, Thelma Phillips and Larry Nielsen: with one playwright choosing to remain anonymous and another using a non-deplume. The plays explore themes as diverse as wartime memories, lifelong friendship, love and choices, aging and memory, and the unexpected humor found in everyday moments.

Each 10-minute play uses minimal scenery to allow for quick transitions between pieces, creating an energetic theatrical experience that keeps audiences engaged from start to finish. Whether audiences are moved by the poignant farewell in "Til the Geese Fly North," laugh at the absurdity of "Under the Seats," or reflect on the touching encounters in "Seeking Shelter," the festival promises an evening of memorable storytelling.

New and never before staged works from local playwrights will be brought to life by local actors and directors. Each "play" is approximately 10 minutes long and uses minimal scenery for quick changes. The range of themes – from thought-provoking drama to laugh-out-loud comedy – offers something for everyone.

Playwrights are from St. Joseph, Stevensville, Benton Harbor, South Haven and South Bend.

Dowagiac man injured in two vehicle crash in Silver Creek

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

SILLVER CREEK TOWNSHIP — A 24-year-old Dowagiac man was injured in Silver Creek Township Sunday in a two-vehicle crash, according to the Cass County Sheriff's Office.

At approximately 4:37 p.m., deputies responded to a two vehicle crash on Townhall Road south of Downey Street in Silver Creek Township.

The investigation showed that a vehicle driven by Kenneth Ian Wilson, 24, of Dowagiac, was southbound on Townhall Road while a vehicle driven by Joel Douglas Layman, 50, of Sodus, was Northbound on on Townhall Road. The two vehicles sideswiped as they passed each other. Wilson was transported by SMCAS Ambulance to Dowagiac Beacon Hospital for injuries sustained in the traffic crash.

Assisting agencies on scene were SMCAS EMS and Indian Lake Fire Department.

Cass County Election Commission to meet

SUBMITTED

CASSOPOLIS — The Cass County Election Commission will meet at 9 a.m. on Feb. 10 in the Probate/Family Courtroom, Law & Courts Building, 60296 M 62, Cassopolis MI 49031.

The purpose of the meeting is to rule on recall language submitted for the Office of President of the Village of Vandalia.

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OBITUARIES

Pastor Edward Villalba

Oct. 7, 1941 – Jan. 19, 2026

Pastor Edward Villalba, 84, formerly of Niles, Michigan and Granger, Indiana, most recently resided in Kingsley, Michigan. Ed, a beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, pastor to pastors, counselor, woodworker, and Michigan fan, died peacefully in his home on Monday, Jan. 19, with his family around him after an extended battle with cancer. His family is grateful for the kind and compassionate care of the hospice staff who supported them in his final days.

Born on Oct. 7, 1941, in Detroit, Michigan, to Felix A. and Celia M (Delagarza) Villalba, Ed graduated from Taylor (Michigan) Center High School. He continued his education at Detroit Bible College and Cedarville (Ohio) University before beginning his vocation in Christian Ministry at Youth For Christ in Detroit and Arlington Heights, Illinois. This launched Ed into a lifetime of ministry as a pastor in multiple churches throughout Michigan and Indiana.

Ed also served with Life Action Ministries (Buchanan, Michigan) first as a Seminar Director and Teacher and then again, years later returning as a retreat leader and counselor for over 1,000 pastors and their wives. He has also served as a faithful, wise counselor to many individuals and couples, even up to his last week of life. Ed has been a longtime member of Gospel City Church in Granger, Indiana, and for the past few months has attended The Tabernacle in Buckley, Michigan.

When he wasn't pastoring or counseling, Ed enjoyed woodworking, and created wonderful pieces of furniture for his family. Even there, in his shop, he was led to complete each project by the example set in Philippians 1:6 "… He Who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion …"

Ed was an enthusiastic fan of the University of Michigan football team, and of the Detroit Lions, watching the games "with" his daughter. Even though they lived in different towns, they spent the games texting back and forth, because while Ed loved sports, his greatest passion was his family. Early in his ministry, while with YFC in Arlington Heights, he met Gayle Kasen, who he married on June 6, 1963, and with whom he celebrated sixty-two years of marriage.

Ed and Gayle were sadly preceded in death by their son, Timothy Keith Villalba on Nov. 7, 2015. Ed was also preceded in death by his parents, and by a brother, Richard Villalba in 1980 Surviving family includes his wife, Gayle Kasen Villalba and their daughter, Jody (& John) Hackbarth of Kingsley; grandchildren – to whom he is affectionately known as "Morfy" – Heather (& Aaron) Mayes, Hailey (& Rev. Adam) Dollar, Hudson (& Jennifer) Hackbarth, and Caleb Villalba; great-grandchildren, Daniel Edward Mayes, Grace Mayes, Peter Mayes, Leo Dollar, Oliver Dollar, Birdie Dollar, Kasen Hackbarth, and Roman Hackbarth; Ed's siblings, Bertha Pro of Bloomington, Illinois, Martha Garrett of Pahrump, Nevada, Gloria Dourth of Florida, and Ida Talbot of Washington; and many nieces and nephews.

The Memorial Service for Pastor Ed Villalba will be at 11 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 30 at the Gospel City Church, 52277 Hickory Road in Granger, Indiana with Lead Pastor Micah Klutinoty officiating. The family is gathering privately for a Committal Service at Smith Chapel Cemetery in Milton Township, Michigan.

The family will receive relatives and friends on Thursday, Jan. 29 at Gospel City Church from 4-8 p.m. Contributions in memory of Pastor Ed may be made to Life Action Ministries, 2727 Niles-Buchanan Road, Buchanan, Michigan 49107; https://lifeaction.org/.

Arrangements were completed at the Halbritter-Wickens Funeral Home, 615 East Main Street in Niles. Memories and condolences may be left online at: www.halbritterwickens.com Psalms 90:10 tell us that "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years."

Ed exceeded that promise, and used those years – including the extras – pursuing his passions. Yes, football, and woodworking, but more so preaching, pastoring, and counseling; and more important is the love that he had for those who he pastored and counseled, and for his family. He and his son shared a motto: "Live so to be missed", and they did; but beyond that goal, Ed's life fulfilled a command – given by a fellow carpenter two thousand years ago – to Love God and Love People.

Lorna Suits

Aug. 9, 1931 – Jan. 25, 2026

Lorna June (Greenwood) Suits, 94, passed away peacefully at The Timbers of Cass County on Sunday, Jan. 25, 2026. Born on Aug. 9, 1931, in Dowagiac, Michigan, Lorna was the second of nine children born to Arthur and Verna Greenwood. After graduating from high school in 1949, she married K. David Suits, who preceded her in death in 1989. Together, they bought a cottage at Indian Lake in 1954 and turned it into a home where they raised two daughters, Janeen Rose and Karen Dee. She lived in the home for 71 years.

Lorna was a very talented person with varied interests. She was a fine seamstress, sewing many of the girl's clothes, from bridal gowns to Barbie clothes. She loved to refinish furniture and she built a large ceramic collection over the years, utilizing those skills later in life when she taught ceramics at the Cass County Council on Aging. She was a great cook, known especially for her delicious pies and her ham gravy. She was a "family historian" of sorts, putting together photo albums that were shared at the huge annual Greenwood Christmas party.

She was a loving and supporting mother and grandmother, always looking forward to the next visit by her grandkids, family members, neighbors and friends. Her thoughtfulness will be remembered by all.

Lorna participated in many card clubs and was an active member of the Red Hat Society. She helped plan many class reunions. Her true passion, however, was her extensive collection of salt and pepper shakers. She, along with her friend, Jean Rowe, traveled all over the country attending conventions and developing friendships with other collectors. Lorna enjoyed bringing them out for every holiday, especially Christmas, where her large collection of snowmen amazed her friends and family.

For many years, she worked at Sister Lakes Hardware, helping customers find the things they were looking for and advising them on the best approach for the task at hand. She also managed the U.S. Post Office located in the store.

Lorna is survived by her daughters, Janeen Stockwell and Karen (Dave) Moran; grandchildren, Bill (Melinda) Stockwell, Rebecca (Chad) Luthringer, Kelsey (Bobby) Ramsbottom, and Davey (Katie) Moran; great-grandchildren, Denver Luthringer, Gavin Luthringer, Sophia Stockwell, Maddie Stockwell, James Ramsbottom, Jake Ramsbottom, Lucy Moran, Joni Moran and Davis Moran; siblings, Virgil (Joyce) Greenwood, James "Moe" (Carolyn) Greenwood, Andrea (Jim) Klett, and Doug Greenwood, and sister-in-law, Judy (Larry) Greenwood. Lorna was preceded in death by her sisters, Mary Criswell and Diane Hatch and brothers, Larry Greenwood and Gregg Greenwood.

Memorial contributions in Lorna's name can be directed to the Cass County Council on Aging (www.casscoa.org). Visitation for Lorna will be on Friday, Feb. 6 from 10-11 a.m., with a Memorial Service to be held at 11 a.m. at Mission Hills Memorial Chapel, 61453 M-51, Niles, Michigan. Lorna will be laid to rest next to her husband, David, at Mission Hills Memorial Gardens. He has been patiently waiting for this day for the last 37 years.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home. Photos, condolences, and memories may be shared with Lorna's family at www.BrownFuneralHomeNiles.com.

Patricia Wiggins

June 30, 1930 – Jan. 23, 2026

Mrs. Patricia Ann Wiggins, 95 of Lebanon, Tennessee, passed away Friday morning, Jan. 23, 2026, at her home. She was born June 30, 1930, in Chicago, Illinois, to the late Michael G. Sanders and Marie McGinnis and later adopted by Hubert H. and Ida M. White. She spent most of her working life as a school bus driver in the Dowagiac Public School System.

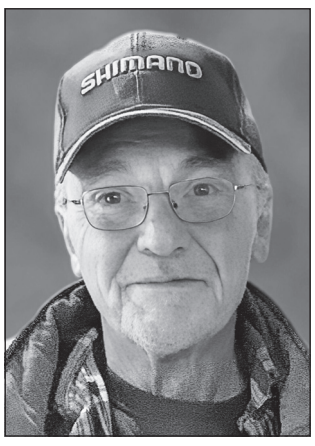
She was preceded in death by her husband, Floyd Wiggins and son, Robert Wiggins.

Survived by her son, Richard Wiggins, of Wisconsin; two daughters, Penny (Michael) Johnson, of Lebanon, TN, and Patty (David) Accoe, of Dowagiac, MI; 14 grandchildren; 33 great-grandchildren and 19 great-great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 19 in the chapel of Anthony Funeral Home. Visitation with the family will be held prior from 12 Noon to service time. Anthony Funeral Home, 337 McMurry Blvd. E, Hartsville, TN 37074, 615-374-2280, www.anthonyfhhartsville.com.

James 'Jim' D. Bradford Jr.

Sept. 7, 1955 – Jan. 25, 2026



James "Jim" D. Bradford Jr., 70, of Dowagiac died Sunday, Jan. 25, 2026, surrounded by family. He was born on Sept. 7, 1955, in Sturgis, Michigan to James Sr. and Fern (Dingman) Bradford.

Jim served honorably in the Army National Guard from 1973-79. He lived and worked for several years in the Sturgis area where, in 1977, Jim married Cynthia "Cindy" Hart (Rohdy). Jim and Cindy had two sons, Jarrid and Joshua. Jim and Cindy divorced in 2003 but remained friends until his death. Jim was a firefighter and fire marshal with the City of Sturgis.

In the late 1980s Jim moved to Dowagiac to work as the city building official. Jim was a member of the Dowagiac Volunteer Fire Department and retired from the city serving as the director of public services. Jim was an avid outdoorsman with many fishing and hunting buddies.

He left a few behind, for now, and a few more are waiting for him at a boat launch somewhere. Surviving are his son and daughter-in-law, Jarrid and Colleen Bradford; two grandchildren, Rowan and Jenna Bradford; two sisters, Linda Gates and Vickie Armstrong, and many other friends and family. Preceding him in death were his infant son, Joshua Bradford; parents; and sister, Debra Gearhart.

A funeral service to celebrate Jim's life will be held at 2 p.m., on Tuesday, Feb. 3 at Clark Chapel – Starks Family Funeral Homes, 405 Center St, Dowagiac, where friends may visit with his family from 12 p.m. until the time of service. Pastor Nathan Wilder of Calvary Bible Church will officiate. Memorial contributions in Jim's name may be directed to your local fire department.

To share a memory or offer condolences, please visit Jim's personalized webpage at www.clarkch.com.

Death notices

Karen Edna Mae Tolliver, 72, of Dowagiac, Michigan, passed away on Jan. 20, 2026. Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Norbert Allen Shembarger, 76, of Eau Claire, Michigan, passed away on Jan. 24, 2026. Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

James Edward Scott III, 55, passed away on Monday, Jan. 26, 2026, in Edwardsburg, Michigan. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Christine Marie Wise, 23, passed away on Monday, Jan. 26, 2026, in Niles, Michigan. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Marie Majerek

April 27, 1928 – Jan. 23, 2026

Agnes Marie Majerek, 97, of Niles, Michigan, passed away on Jan. 23, 2026. Marie was born in Hammond, Indiana on April 27, 1928, to the late Anastashia and Andrew Sabat.

After graduating high school, Marie went to a technical school in Chicago and became a receptionist for the Chicago Daily News. She met her husband, Thaddeus (Ted) Majerek at a dance and from then on they became the perfect dancing partners. They married on Oct. 22, 1949, in Calumet City, Indiana. Together they had eight children. She moved with Ted to Niles, Michigan in 1958 when they bought the Swartz News Agency.

Marie was an artist. She loved to draw, paint, create, and decorate. She was in charge of events such as school functions and charity balls, always creating the backdrops and scenery for these events. She belonged to many organizations such as Psi Iota Xi, Service League, Book and Bridge Clubs. She was the Cub Scout Den Mother and was very involved in St. Mary's School and Church. She was the first woman President of the Niles Chamber of Commerce, was a Rotary member and was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship and the Athena International Award for Leadership. She was one of the original founders of the Niles Apple Festival and Community Showboat Productions. Marie was a good seamstress and made many of the costumes and decorations for shows.

Marie traveled often with her husband, spending Winters in Venice, Florida, where she loved to golf, play bridge and hand and foot. She was an avid reader and had a large collection of recipe books. While she was raising her children, she would buy run down houses to restore and rent out. She owned M & T Enterprises, her own rental business. She started the gift shop section in Majerek's book stores and founded the first antique mall in Southwest Michigan, the Four Flags Antique Mall in the old Montgomery Ward buildings in 1982.

Marie was full of ambition and love. She had a strong will and determined spirit. She was the best wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and friend.

Marie is survived by her children, Tad Majerek of Niles, Mike (Kelle) Majerek of Niles, Jeannie (Mike) Gilbert of Buchanan, Jeff (Merilyn Patterson) Majerek of Elkhart, Debbie (Al) Shirrell of Granger, Dave (Sue) Majerek of Niles, Anita Majerek of Niles, and Tom (Cyndi Hiland) Majerek of Niles; twenty-four grandchildren, Halley Shults, Jessica West Saenz, Shannon Toman Antipov, Kati Wyman, Jennifer Gilbert Howell, Stacey Gilbert Brook, Christia Toman, Angelene Majerek Lord, Willow Wyman, Matthew Majerek, Amanda Gilbert Buck, Maegan Wyman, David Majerek II, Christian Majerek, Amllory Majerek, Sarah Majerek Witkowski, Scott Majerek, T.J. Majerek, Stephanie Majerek Ray, Chad Majerek, Jordan Majerek, Jack Majerek and Ryan Majerek; twenty-eight great-grandchildren, Ashton Brook, Pasha Antipov, Maddison Brook, Jayli Wyman, Misha Antipov, Logan Hood, Ella Lujan, Khloe Dehart, Anya Antipov, Phillip Howell, Bryce Hood, Daxton Howell, Kash Toman, Phillip Lord III, Piper Buck, Hank Buck, Jax Lujan, Daylen Lujan, Charlee Wyman, Tanner Lord, Braxton Thomas, Hudson Ray, Aiden Ray, Kate Witkowski, Miles Witkowski and Annika Lord. Along with her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Ted Majerek, her sisters, Virginia Vargo, Fran Emrey and Theresa, her brother, Chester Sabat, and her grandson Stevie Toman.

A visitation will be held at St. Mary's Catholic Church on June 6, from 10-11 a.m., with mass being held immediately following. Burial will take place following the services at Calvary Cemetery. A luncheon will be held after graveside services at St. Mary's Elementary School.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Marie's name may be made to St. Mary's Church and The Niles Apple Festival.

Leader Publications publishes death notices at a cost of $15. Extended obituaries are priced based on character count.
For more information email obits@leaderpub.com.

Richard Whitmer, ex-Blue Cross CEO and father of the Michigan governor, dead at 85

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING, Mich. — Richard Whitmer, the former longtime leader of health insurance giant Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and father of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, has died, the governor's office announced Tuesday. He was 85.

Richard Whitmer, who went by Dick, previously served in state government, including as commerce secretary for former Gov. Bill Milliken, a Republican, before joining Blue Cross Blue Shield. According to the Western Michigan University alumni association, he was the senior vice president and general counsel for the insurer, beginning in 1977, before becoming president and CEO 10 years later. He retired from the position in 2006.

His daughter, Gretchen, became the state's Democratic governor about 13 years later, taking office at the start of 2019. She was reelected to her second term in 2022 and is currently in her final year as governor because of Michigan's term limits.

"He was the one who always saw my potential and believed in me, from the first speech I gave in fifth grade to my States of the State as governor," Gretchen Whitmer said in a statement Tuesday. "He was always there, whether in the back of the classroom or in the front row of the House Chamber, cheering me on.

"He was the one who picked me up when I was down or told me to get my act together when I screwed up. When my grades were slacking in high school, he inspired me to live up to my potential. Because of his encouragement, I did."

In a 2005 statement announcing Richard Whitmer's upcoming retirement, Gregory Sudderth, chairman of the Blue Cross board, labeled Richard Whitmer a "wonderful and talented CEO."

"He shaped the Blues into the successful, competitive, customer-focused organization that it is today," Sudderth said in 2005. "We are fortunate to have had his leadership these past 17 years."

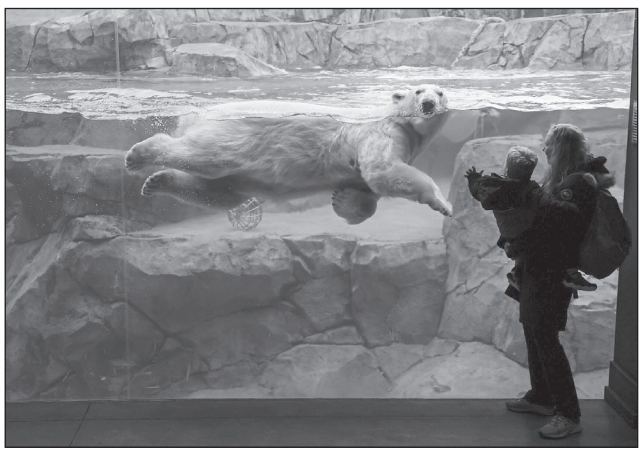
In a statement Tuesday, Tricia Keith, current president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, said Richard Whitmer's tenure was historic and came at a critical time for the organization, which was facing a financial crisis.

"Dick Whitmer's leadership stabilized Blue Cross's finances, restored our relationships and helped our company emerge from the crisis it faced in the 1980s," Keith said. "Dick Whitmer was a leader of integrity and fortitude.

"He put Blue Cross on the path to grow, compete and serve in a new century. He championed transparency and integrity. His tenure was marked by dramatically improved relations between management and labor, founded upon mutual respect and a collaborative spirit."

Zoo leads effort to protect polar bears

By ADRIANA PÉREZ
Chicago Tribune (TNS)



Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune
Kristen Boyer and her 3-year-old son, George Boyer, watch as Amelia Gray, a 9-year-old polar bear, swims at Brookfield Zoo on Jan. 8.

CHICAGO — Shortly after her arrival last fall, Amelia Gray met Hudson, and the pair hit it off immediately. They touched their noses together in greeting and chuffed – a soft, breathy, snorting sound that signals affection or reassurance. Amelia Gray rolled on her back, gently pawing at her counterpart. Later that same day, they played in the pool together.

The connection has fueled hopes at the Brookfield Zoo Chicago that the two polar bears will soon breed, offering scientists a glimpse into how mothers care for newborns inside their maternal dens – and, in the Arctic wilderness, where climate change already threatens their survival.

The usual challenges to studying polar bears in their natural habitat – a harsh climate, a vast, isolated territory and the dangers the massive predators pose to humans – have been further complicated after President Donald Trump in October announced plans to open 1.6 million pristine acres of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain in northeastern Alaska to leasing for oil and gas drilling.

The Trump administration's move has rekindled a sense of urgency among conservationists, eliciting legal challenges from activists and advocates, as well as prompting a coalition of institutions, including Brookfield Zoo, to accelerate research efforts, especially because so much about the species' reproduction remains unknown.

"That's where zoos really have such a unique opportunity to really understand what takes place within that neonatal period with the cub," said Mike Adkesson, president and CEO of the suburban zoo, "to understand what the bears need in terms of ideal terrain for the construction of that den, to understand breeding interactions and how a natural range space may be impacted by changes to wild landscapes."

Climate change from fossil fuel extraction and burning has already significantly affected polar bears in the wild; their populations have rapidly declined as rising global temperatures melt polar caps and reduce the sea ice they need to hunt seals. Photos of bedraggled, emaciated polar bears floating on slabs of ice have become emblematic of the far-reaching impacts of climate change on wildlife. Since 2006, the species has been classified as vulnerable by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

But experts worry that drilling in the species' natural habitat would accelerate their decline even more by further downsizing where they can roam and den, adding physiological stress on the mammals and altering their behavior. Currently, polar bears from the Arctic Ocean's Beaufort Sea den at high densities in the stretch of coastal plain that is being opened to drilling.

"The frightening part is, they are a species that we're seeing such dramatic declines in," Adkesson said, "and it's a species that we could conceivably lose from the face of the Earth in the next 100 years."

Rita Stacey Vondra, who leads Brookfield Zoo's animal care and community engagement teams, added, "And I'll throw in there: Extinction is forever, and we'll never get this species back if we don't do something."

'Hope is now'

Spanning roughly 19 million acres in the northeastern corner of Alaska, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the world's last intact ecosystems. Located on the traditional homelands of the Iñupiat and Gwich'in peoples, the refuge is critical habitat for many migratory birds, caribou and polar bears.

The U.S. Geological Survey has estimated that its coastal plain contains between 4.3 billion and 11.8 billion barrels of recoverable oil. The low end of the estimate is less than the total crude oil production in 2024 in the United States, which was 4.6 billion barrels.

Institutions from the newly formed Polar Bear Population Alliance hope their collaborative efforts – to understand the repercussions of habitat disturbances on wild populations from drilling before they occur – can be used to inform policy around timing and siting for drilling, Adkesson said. How would the polar bears' diets and their metabolism change in a smaller range? Would that, in turn, affect their reproductive success if they don't have enough fat reserves to nurse their cubs?

The goal is to offer science-backed guidelines for rules and regulations, including time periods related to breeding and reproduction during which disturbances should be kept at a minimum, as well as areas where it is critical that drilling be avoided. Whether or not the government and fossil fuel companies would heed the advice is hard to predict.

"That would be the hope," Adkesson said.

Collecting samples from even just a few bears in wild, remote areas, however, can be a painstaking, yearslong process. Research with captive polar bears can fill in that gap, supplying additional samples, Adkesson said.

At Brookfield Zoo, the polar bears – with some enticement – voluntarily take part in the research, offering their paws for blood draws and opening their massive jaws up for a mouth swab. They are trained multiple times a day to practice participating in their own care and medical evaluations. Specifically, researchers at the zoo are focused on the animal's welfare and reproduction, such as figuring out smart pairings for breeding, as well as understanding what den designs best support successful births.

On a chilly January morning, senior animal care specialist Erin Hennessy stood in front of a grate door looking into Hudson's habitat. The male bear, having been summoned with a bell, approached at a lumbering pace.

"Paw," Hennessy said, putting her hand against the metal. Hudson raised a large, furry front paw to meet her hand, earning a tasty spoonful of smooth peanut butter that he happily licked across the grating.

"That's currently his favorite," said Brianna Pohl, lead animal care specialist. "They need a reason to want to participate."

COURT

From page A1

academic and soccer career at the collegiate level.

Henry is 17 years old and the daughter of Brian and Shelly Henry. She has one sister, Emily. Henry is a Dowagiac senior and is dual-enrolled at Southwestern Michigan College. She is the president of Student Senate, social media coordinator of the Rotary Interact Club and a member of both the Chieftain Heart and Humanities Club. She is a receptionist at Elite Aesthetics Medical Spa, and works with Blueprint Photography.

After graduation, Henry plans to obtain her bachelor's degree in marketing at Grand Valley State University and then acquire an internship for a career in business marketing.

Northrop is 17 years old and is the daughter of Scott and Kimberly Northrup. She has four sisters and three brothers. A senior at Dowagiac Union High School, Northrop also attends Van Buren Tech, where she is earning her CNA license. She is a member of the sideline cheer team, competitive cheer team and Rotary Interact Club. Outside of school, she enjoys hanging out with her friends.

After graduation, Northrop plans to attend Grand Valley State University. After completing her first year at GVSU, she will begin basic training with the National Guard.

Below, McDonald, Henry and Northrop shared their thoughts on their pageant experience, their goals and more. (Note: This conversation has been edited for both length and clarity.)

What was it like to wake up as Dowagiac royalty?

McDonald: It still didn't feel real. Even after making the final five, I was like "this is not real." It still feels like a dream.

Henry: I've just been feeling overwhelmed with love, from everyone – my family, my community, everything. It's been so overwhelming but amazing.

Northrop: I feel the same way as these ladies. I woke up and my crown was right there and I thought of everybody who voted for me. I felt so grateful and so happy.

What inspired each of you to come out for the pageant this year?

McDonald: I didn't really want to do it at the beginning, and then my friend [Marlie Carpenter] and I – it was kind of a "if you do it, I'll do it" situation. I did it and I just wanted to show all the little girls that they can play football and also go out for a pageant.

Henry: My grandma and my sister said "just do it." I turned my application in on the last day and I was like, "I don't know" and they said, "Just go! Just go!" So I did it.

Northrop: My mom and grandma started talking me into it a little bit, so I did some more thinking and then Amelia Bakeman joined it and was always telling me how fun it was. I thought I might as well step out of my comfort zone and go for it.

What was your favorite part of pageant prep?

McDonald: My favorite part was the first night we all started to share our platforms because everybody was so vulnerable that night, showing a different side that we don't usually see at school. I thought that was really special, because that was only our second day of practice and I feel like that prepared us well for what was to come.

Henry: Honestly, it was probably the day of the pageant when we were all behind the current that was about to open. We were like, "Okay, let's go! We got this!" I think that was my favorite part.

Northrop: I didn't have a true favorite part. I enjoyed all of the little memories we made.

What are you most looking forward to accomplish during your reign?

McDonald: I don't think there's one thing I'm looking forward to. I'm kind of looking forward to it all; just being in the community I think is going to be really fun.

Henry: I'm excited to plan and go to events that are related to all of our platforms because they did tell us in the beginning that whatever we were passionate about, we would try to make events with that, so I'm excited.

Northrop: I'm excited for all of it. Spending time getting to know more people and just showing that it's okay to do something that makes you uncomfortable, because no matter what, there's a possibility.

The Miss Dowagiac Scholarship Pageant celebrated 85 years. What was it like getting to know some of the past royalty?

McDonald: I think it was cool to just see how the pageant has evolved. Some of the backroom moms were like, "we had our interview a week before the pageant," or "we didn't have a group interview at all," so I think it was really cool to see what it was like.

Henry: Seeing all the past royalty was definitely inspiring just knowing that we did the right thing in participating.

Northrop: I agree with what everyone has said. [Pageant emcee and Miss Dowagiac 2015 Tori (Smith) Warsko] is great. She's the kindest person ever and she's just so sweet. She calmed my nerves and it was awesome.

What advice would you give to the next generation of Miss Dowagiac contestants?

McDonald: I would tell them to not let their fear hold them back. I had my application filled out and I waited until the last day to turn it in and here I am today. I've done so much, even just in a short amount of time.

Henry: I would say do it because even if you don't get it, it's such an amazing opportunity.

Northrop: Just go for it, just be who you are. You're going to make mistakes but you're going to learn from them. Just put yourself out there. It's a way to better yourself and grow.

ASSIGNMENTS

From page A1

Those assignments are:

■ Tom Langley, District 1: Economic Development Corporation/Brownfield Development Authority, Human Services Coordinating Council, Market One, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, SMART Committee.

■ James Lawrence, District 2: Cass County Planning Commission, Community Corrections Advisory Board, Local Emergency Planning Committee, Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency, SMART Committee.

■ Alan Northrop, District 3: SMART Committee.

■ Jeremiah Jones, District 4: Land Bank Authority, Van Buren/Cass District Board of Health, SMART Committee.

■ Michael Grice, District 5: Area Agency on Aging, Central Dispatch Authority, Market One, Materials Management Committee, Woodlands Behavioral Healthcare Network, Workforce Development (Kinexus), SMART Committee.

■ Sam Barrera, District 6: Parks and Recreation Commission, SMART Committee.

■ Roseann Marchetti, District 7: Board of Public Works, Cass County Planning Commission, Land Bank Authority, Niles Area Transportation Study, Van Buren/Cass District Board of Health, Kinexus Workforce Development, Opioid Settlement Committee, SMART Committee.

■ RJ Lee, District 8: Michigan State University Extension Council, Opioid Settlement Committee, Southwest Michigan Behavioral Health Substance Use Disorder Oversight Policy Board, Woodlands Behavioral Board, Southwest Michigan Substance Abuse Advisory Member, SMART Committee.

A full overview of boards and commissions to which the Board of Commissioners appoints members can be found at casscountymi.org/1283/Boards-and-Commissions.

Three commissioners were also selected as liaisons between the board of commissioners and four different agencies:

Cass County Council on Aging: Michael Grice

Negotiations: Jeremiah Jones

Prison re-entry board: James Lawrence

Veterans Advisory: Michael Grice

Commissioner Lee was again appointed as the County parliamentarian.

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A Public Service Announcement from Your Local IT Experts

In today's world, technology is no longer optional, it's the backbone of how we work, communicate, bank, shop, and live. And just as technology has evolved, so have the criminals who target it.

Custom Computer Company (CCCIT) is a locally owned and operated IT company that has earned the trust of businesses, organizations, and families throughout our community. We don't operate from another state or another country. We live here, work here, and serve our neighbors every day. That matters, especially when something goes wrong.

Here's the public service announcement everyone needs to hear: Cyber criminals are no longer just targeting big corporations.

In fact, most attacks today are aimed at small businesses, mom-and-pop shops, nonprofits, churches, and even residential users. Why? Because they're often easier targets. Outdated computers, weak passwords, unprotected email, or no active monitoring.

One hacked email account can drain a bank account. One infected computer can shut down a business for days. One fake invoice or "urgent" email can cost thousands. We see it every week.

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For businesses, we help keep operations running, protect customer data, and meet modern security expectations.

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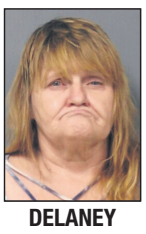
Area residents sentenced on drug, obstruction charges

By DEBRA HAIGHT
Leader Correspondent

NILES — A former Buchanan resident was sentenced to prison Monday in Berrien County Trial Court at the Niles courthouse.

Karen Marie Delaney, 59, now of Eau Claire, pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine and was sentenced to 19 months to 10 years in prison. She has credit for 58 days served and must pay $198 in fines and costs.


DELANEY

The incident occurred Nov. 29, 2025 on Deans Hill Road in Berrien Township near Berrien Springs. A second charge of possession of contraband in a jail or prison was dismissed.

Berrien County Trial Judge Gordon Hosbein ruled that Delaney's Michigan prison sentence will be consecutive to any sentence she receives in Indiana for similar offenses.

Delaney was arrested by South Bend, Ind. police on Dec. 4, 2024 and charged with two counts of possession of methamphetamine, possession of paraphernalia and introducing a controlled substance into a body.

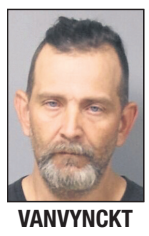
Her past criminal record also includes charges for leaving the scene of an accident, possession of an altered/false drivers license and public intoxication.

Two other people were also sentenced for meth possession.

Robert Allen Johnson, 45, of Niles, pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine and was sentenced to 100 days in jail with credit for 58 days served and $198 in fines and costs.

JOHNSON

The incident occurred Nov. 19, 2025 at Martin's Supermarket in Niles.


VANVYNCKT

Benjamin Keith Vanvynckt, 42, of South Bend, pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine and was sentenced to credit for 60 days in jail already served and $258 in fines and costs.

The incident occurred Nov. 28, 2025 in Niles Township. Vanvynckt will be extradited back to Indiana where he faces other charges.

Colin Richard Steele 49, of Benton Harbor, pleaded guilty to two counts of resisting and obstructing police and was sentenced to two concurrent terms of 150 days in jail with credit for 115 days served and $266 in fines and costs.

STEELE

The incident occurred Oct. 4, 2025 in Niles.

The long awaited trial of a Buchanan man charged with driving drunk and killing a Berrien County Road Department worker in 2022 is scheduled to start this week. Jury selection is set to start at the Niles courthouse on Wednesday with the trial expected to finish up by late Friday.

Taylor Ryan Johnson, 37, of Buchanan, faces a charge of driving while intoxicated causing the death of Berrien County Road Department worker William "Mack" Isom on July 20, 2022. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and a fine of up to $10,000.

The July 20, 2022 incident occurred on Red Bud Trail in Oronoko Township and took the life of Isom who was trimming tree branches in the roadway. The preliminary breathalyzer test (PBT) administered after the accident showed Johnson with a blood alcohol level of over .19 which is more than twice the legal limit.

The case has been delayed a number of times since the 2022 incident with Johnson's attorneys appealing trial court decisions to the Michigan Court of Appeals and Michigan Supreme Court. The most recent set back at the COA came in early June, 2025 when Johnson's appeal regarding the suppression of evidence was denied.

Winter storms don't have to be deadly – here's how to stay safe

By BRETT ROBERTSON
Associate Professor and Associate Director of the Hazards Vulnerability and Resilience Institute

THE CONVERSATION

(THE CONVERSATION) — A powerful winter storm that left hundreds of thousands of people across the U.S. without power for days in freezing temperatures in late January 2026 has been linked to more than 80 deaths, and the cold weather is forecast to continue into February. Several East Coast states are also facing a new winter storm, forecast to bring several inches of snow starting Jan. 30.

The causes of the deaths and injuries have varied. Some people died from exposure to cold inside their homes. Others fell outside or suffered heart attacks while shoveling snow. Three young brothers died after falling through ice on a Texas pond. Dozens of children were treated for carbon monoxide poisoning from improperly used generators or heaters.

These tragedies and others share a common theme: Winter storms pose multiple dangers at once, and people often underestimate how quickly conditions can become life-threatening.

I'm the associate director of the Hazards Vulnerability and Resilience Institute at the University of South Carolina, where we work on ways to improve emergency preparedness and response. Here is what people need to know to reduce their risk of injury during severe winter weather.

Prepare before the storm arrives

Preparation makes the biggest difference when temperatures drop, and services fail. Many winter storm injuries happen after power outages knock out heat, lighting or medical equipment.

Start by assembling a basic emergency kit. The Federal Emergency Management Agency recommends having water, food that does not require cooking, a flashlight, a battery-powered radio, extra batteries and a first-aid kit, at minimum.

In wintertime, you'll also need warm clothing, blankets, hats and gloves. When you go out, even in a vehicle, make sure you dress for the weather. Keep a blanket in the car in case you get stranded, as hundreds of people did for hours overnight on a Mississippi highway on Jan. 27 in freezing, snowy weather.

Portable phone chargers matter more than many people realize. During emergencies, phones become lifelines for updates, help and contact with family. Keep devices charged ahead of the storm and conserve battery power once the storm begins.

If anyone in your home depends on electrically powered medical equipment, make a plan now. Know where you can go if the power goes out for an extended period. Contact your utility provider in advance to ask about outage planning, including whether they offer priority restoration or guidance for customers who rely on powered medical equipment.

What to do if the power goes out

Loss of heat is one of the most serious dangers of winter storms. Hypothermia can occur indoors when temperatures drop, especially overnight.

If the power goes out, choose one room to stay in and close its doors to keep the warmth inside. Cover windows with curtains or blankets. Wear loose layers and a knit hat to keep your own body heat in, even indoors. Remember to also eat regular snacks and drink warm fluids when possible, since the body uses energy to stay warm.

It might seem tempting, but don't use camp stoves, outdoor grills or generators inside a home. These can quickly produce carbon monoxide, an odorless and deadly gas. During the January storm, one Nashville hospital saw more than 40 children with carbon monoxide poisoning linked to unsafe heating practices.

If you must use a generator, keep it outdoors and far from windows and doors. Make sure your home's carbon monoxide detectors are working before storms arrive.

If your home becomes too cold, go to a warmer place, such as a friend's home, a warming center or a public shelter. You can call 2-1-1, a nationwide hotline, to find local options. The American Red Cross and the Salvation Army also list open shelters on their websites. Several states maintain online maps for finding warming centers and emergency services during winter storms, including Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, Tennessee, and Texas.

Be careful outside – ice changes things

Winter storms make everyday activities dangerous. Ice turns sidewalks into slippery hazards. Snow shoveling strains the heart. Frozen ponds and lakes might look solid but often are not as the ice can change quickly with weather conditions.

Walking on icy surfaces, even your own sidewalk, requires slow steps, proper footwear and full attention to what you're doing. Falls can cause head injuries or broken bones, and it can happen with your first step out the door.

Shoveling snow is a common risk that people often overlook, but it deserves special caution. The actions of shoveling in cold weather can place intense strain on the heart. For people with heart conditions, it that extra strain can trigger heart attacks.

If you're shoveling, take frequent breaks. Push snow instead of lifting when possible. And stop immediately if you feel chest pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath.

Communication saves time and lives

Winter storms disrupt information flows. Cell service fails. Internet access drops. Power outages silence televisions.

In my research on heat and storm emergencies, people frequently rely on personal networks to share updates, resources, and safety information. With that in mind, check on family, friends and neighbors, especially older adults and people who live alone.

Research I have conducted shows that nearby social ties matter during disasters because they help people share information and act more quickly when services are disrupted. Make sure that the information you're sharing is coming from reliable sources – not everything on social media is. Also, let others know where you plan to go if conditions worsen.

Use multiple sources for information. Battery-powered radios remain critical during winter storms. Sign up for local emergency alerts by email or text. Studies have found that in regions accustomed to frequent hazardous weather, people often take actions in response to risks more slowly when they don't have reliable local updates or clear alerts.

Practice matters

Many injuries happen because people delay actions they know they need to take. They wait to leave a house that's getting too cold or at risk of damage by weather, such as flooding. They wait to ask for help. They wait to adjust plans.

In research I contributed to on evacuation drills involving wildfires, people who practiced their evacuation plan in advance were more likely to react quickly when conditions changed. Talking through evacuation plans for any type of emergency, whether a hurricane or a winter storm, builds people's confidence and reduces their hesitation.

Take time each winter to review your emergency supplies, communication plans, and heating options.

Winter storms will test your preparation, judgment, and patience. You cannot control when the next one arrives, but you can decide how ready you will be when it does.

This article, originally published Jan. 29, 2026, has been updated with additional details on the new storm.

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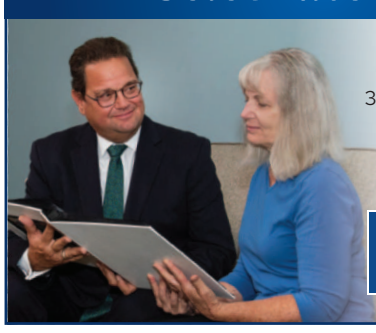

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BEACON HEALTH SYSTEM

Dowagiac school district invites input on grade level centers

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

DOWAGIAC — The Dowagiac Union Schools is re-evaluating the organization of schools in the district and is inviting the community to participate in the process.

The district is inviting the community and parents to attend a series of informational nights regarding a proposal to reconfigure and restructure its elementary buildings into Grade Level Centers for the 2026-2027 school year.

The informational sessions are designed to foster engagement and collaboration as the district prepares for the transition. Four meetings are scheduled throughout the month of February, with all sessions running from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. The first meeting will take place Feb. 1 at Sister Lakes, followed by a session Feb. 8 at Patrick Hamilton. The third night will be held Feb. 15 at Kincheloe and the final informational meeting is set for Feb. 22 at Justus Gage.

According to district officials, the implementation of Grade Level Centers is intended to establish equitable classrooms across grades K-12 by addressing class size, social dynamics, emotional well-being and academic needs. The new structure aims to provide teachers with more collaborative time and opportunities to become experts in their respective grade levels through targeted curriculum and programming. To facilitate this staff planning and collaboration, the district intends to implement a weekly late start.

The district listed several benefits the proposal would offer students, including the creation of weekly enrichment and intervention opportunities. District leaders say the centers will foster an age-appropriate environment featuring consistent behavioral expectations and focused behavioral systems while cultivating a sense of safety and security. Additionally, the reconfiguration is designed to create transitions that better prepare students for the shift to middle school.

Professional growth for district employees is another key component of the plan. Grade Level Centers are expected to increase mentorship and peer support opportunities for staff while offering professional development tailored to enhance expertise in specific grade levels.

Photo provided

Justus Gage Elementary School.

During a May 2025 board meeting discussing the topic, Blomgren said that transportation is one of the most frequently asked questions regarding the shift to GLCs and that the money saved from closing a building would help pay for transportation needs.

"By not running one of the buildings, we can easily add a couple more bus routes to the transportation part of things so that kids are getting to where they need to be more efficiently," he said.

According to Blomgren, the cost to keep an elementary school building is approximately $2.5 million per year.

Classroom cellphone bills head to Whitmer after near unanimous vote

LANSING (MLive.com / TNS) — A pair of bills limiting the use of cellphones in classrooms received near-unanimous support in the Michigan Senate today, each passing by a vote of 34-1.

The legislation approved Thursday now heads to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who officials in Lansing indicated this week was expected to greenlight the ban before she delivered her next State of the State address.

House Bill 4141, if adopted into law, would amend the Revised School Code to mandate school districts establish a wireless communications device policy to ban use of cellphones on school grounds during instructional time.

However, how policies would be enforced would largely be up to individual districts and public academies.

Also moved on Thursday was Senate Bill 495, which bill sponsor Sen. Dayna Polehanki, D-Livonia, said would require districts to also have protocol for when and how students are permitted to use cell phones during emergency situations.

Both bills reflect the minimum standard schools must enact, Polehanki said, but districts can implement more strict policies when they choose.

It wasn't clear how many school districts already have bans in place – the Michigan Department of Education has not previously identified a number – though lawmakers, teachers and school officials have emphasized the benefits of cellphone restrictions are immediate and far-reaching, limiting distractions in class and opening students up more socially.

"All of a sudden, you've got 32 pairs of eyeballs staring back at you. I mean, the impact is immediate," said state Rep. Mark Tisdel, R-Rochester Hills, who introduced the measure with fellow Republican Reps. Nancy DeBoer and Kathy Schmaltz.

Last week, the state House voted to approve the bill during its first session of 2026.

Tisdel's first iteration of the legislation was drafted in June 2023, and the measure has previously failed to reach full bi-partisan support. Another bill introduced by Senate Democrats last year would have pushed for schools and districts to implement a policy without legislating an exact mandate.

Since then, Tisdel said he's talked to "an awful lot of administrators, principals, teachers, parents" and other legislators about the proposed ban.

Despite requiring restriction policies statewide, HB 4141 would still allow exemptions for things like medically needed devices, as well as school-issued devices like tablets or laptops used for instruction and special education programs.

Emergency situations would also be accommodated.

"There's been a lot of consideration (to) go into this," Tisdel said in an interview this week. "Parents' primary concern is they'll lose the ability to contact their child during the day. If that's a concern in the bill … the child is allowed to take a basic phone to school all day long.

"It's the smartphone where the prohibitions and restrictions apply because the smartphones are a distraction."

Whitmer originally called for lawmakers to restrict cellphone use in classrooms during her 2025 State of the State.

REIGN

From page A1

Isabel, who in 2014 was selected as Miss Congeniality. She is the captain of the robotics team, president of National Honor Society, Vice president of Hospitality for Distributive Education Clubs of America, Educational Talent Search Advisory Board member and is a student representative on the Dowagiac School Board.

Vazquez volunteers at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church Food Pantry, is a New Day Youth Group Intercessor, a human resource clerk intern at Cass Family Clinic and works at Driftwood summer shop. She plans to attend a four-year University to study business administration with a focus in human resources.

'I wanted to be a bright light'

Vazquez said she chose to participate in the pageant to be a "bright light" for people going through difficult times. During her platform speech, she shared her experience of texting the suicide hotline as a freshman in high school and how her faith led her to becoming a leader in the community.

"Suicide awareness is super important to me and I went through a really hard time in my life," she said. "Coming out of that, I wanted to be someone's bright light. I wanted to be someone's hope for a better tomorrow. So truthfully, God inspired me to finally speak up and be someone's light and that's what I wanted to do."

For Vazquez, being a student representative on the board of education helped prepare her for the bright lights of pageantry.

"It has helped me immensely," she said. just being on a stage instead of feeling 'it's bright up here.' It's helped my speaking skills a lot and getting to meet a lot of people who impact not only our school but me directly. All of my extracurriculars have just helped me become more of a well-rounded person."

While the entire pageant experience was something Vazquez will not soon forget, she said getting to know her fellow contestants was her favorite part.

"I've gone to school with these girls for four years or eight years but I feel like I really got to know them that first night," she said. "As we've gone through all the motions, I've just been so blessed to get to know these girls a lot better."

Vazquez aims to use her time as Miss Dowagiac to inspire the next generation of Dowagiac's youth. She looks forward to visiting schools with her Court of Honor and spreading kindness and confidence throughout the community.

"I think it's really important as young ladies to inspire the next generation of people who come up from middle school, especially because middle school was such a hard time for me," she said. "It's where my heart's at and I think that we can help get them ready and excited for life, not only our high school, but our community as a whole."

The pageant was not only a celebration of the pageant's present but also its rich history, with several members of past Miss Dowagiac royalty present to celebrate the pageant's 85 years in the community. A display in the hall featured photos, dresses, sashes and crowns from past Miss Dowagiac pageants.

Vazquez enjoyed getting to know past queens and feels honored to be a part of the ongoing tradition.

"It was breathtaking, to be honest," she said. "They're all so gorgeous but it was so refreshing just to be there with them and just be in the moment. It was really awesome to get to know them. My sister, Isabel, was Miss Congeniality in 2014 so she introduced me to the whole thing and then I got to know [emcee and Miss Dowagiac 2015 Tori (Smith) Warsko] a lot better. She knew my siblings in high school, so it was just awesome to be there and get to know them better."

When asked what advice she would give young girls interested in participating in future Miss Dowagiac pageants, Vazquez encouraged them to take the plunge.

"Have hope. There is a new tomorrow and no matter what, whether you mess up on the dance, mess up on your speech, no matter what, it's you," she said. "The most important part of growing is to get to know yourself better and to never switch up for anyone else. Don't put on a mask; it's not worth it. Just be you."

As her reign gets underway, Vazquez looks forward to being Dowagiac's "bright light."

"At first, I was so sad that [the pageant] was ending so quickly but it's not the ending, it's just the beginning," she said. "I'm looking at this as an opportunity to be that light again and show the young girls, the young boys and everyone that you matter so much and that's what I'm really looking forward to. Just just bringing light to our community."

COUNCIL

From page A1

consulting support. Consulting support is not a new concept for the city, which has regularly contracted for economic development support services to aid staff and elected officials to promote economic opportunities, economic growth and job creation.

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Sports

Notre Dame announces 2026 football schedule
Page B2

Got results?
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Michigan prep athletes granted NIL opportunities

THE DETROIT NEWS (TNS)

Michigan high school athletes will be able to earn money through expanded Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) deals, just like their college counterparts, the Michigan High School Athletic Association announced Tuesday.

The MHSAA, which calls these deals "personal branding activities" (PBA), previously allowed some PBA opportunities, for things such as camps, clinics and private lessons. The new policy allows Michigan athletes to capitalize on additional opportunities.

"We have said from the start of this conversation that the MHSAA could be comfortable with a policy that provides individual branding opportunities for individual student-athletes, and this rule change provides those while excluding the possibility of collectives, and boosters and school people getting involved in those activities," MHSAA executive director Mark Uyl said in a release. "This is the essence of what NIL was supposed to allow in the first place, and we're confident we've crafted language that allows true NIL opportunities without affecting competitive equity among our member schools."

Additional activities allowed by the new policy include social media endorsements and promotions, personal appearances, photo sessions, autograph signings, modeling, sports cards, apparel sales, and the use of a student's name, image or likeness in marketing materials, the MHSAA said.

Student-athletes are not permitted to capitalize on PBA based on athletic performances, awards, team participation or competition outcomes. They are also not permitted to use school names, logos, mascots, trademarks, uniforms or other intellectual property.

Also, PBA activities may not occur during school attendance or any MHSAA event (including practice) and cannot take place on school property or be promoted on school media channels.

Schools, including coaches and other employees, are not allowed to solicit, arrange, negotiate, or promote PBA activities on behalf of their athletes.

"We have provided clear language and sufficient guidance on what is allowed to assist our schools as they navigate this ever-changing landscape," Uyl said.

The MHSAA says it will prohibit PBA that it deems inappropriate. All PBA must be disclosed to the MHSAA at least seven business days in advance of an opportunity or contract being accepted, and receive MHSAA approval.

Jeff Douglas / For Leader Publications

Michigan high school athletes will now be able to earn money through expanded Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) deals.

SMC begins fundraising for wrestling facility

SUBMITTED

DOWAGIAC — Southwestern Michigan College has launched a new fundraising campaign called "Room to Grapple" with a goal of $200,000 to potentially name its new wrestling room after Hall of Fame Coach James J. Judd.

Room to Grapple is a mini-campaign within the larger Room to Grow campaign for the wrestling facility nearing completion, followed by improvements to the Dale A. Lyons Building choral and instrumental music areas.

Judd was SMC's only wrestling coach from 1968 until 1992. The New Baltimore, Ohio, native, born Dec. 29, 1937, and died Dec. 24, 2021, spent 38 years with the college, continuing to teach physical education until 2006. He was one of three original SMC coaches, along with Ron Gunn, cross country/track, and Jim Tansey, basketball.

In 1990 Judd was named to the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Okla.

Coach Judd, also SMC's first golf coach, produced 85 academic All-American wrestlers, with more than 150 going on to four-year colleges and universities.

One of Judd's former wrestlers, Todd Hesson, currently coaches the Roadrunners – a position landed weeks after Coach Judd's passing.

SMC three-peated the Michigan Community College Athletic Association championship and captured the 2025 Great Lakes District Championship in Illinois in the first three years since the sport's 2022 revival after a 30-year absence.

See **WRESTLING**, page B1

Southwestern Michigan College has launched a new fundraising campaign to potentially name its new wrestling room after Hall of Fame Coach James J. Judd.

No. 3-ranked Brandywine rolls to 52-23 victory against Edwardsburg

Bobcats stay perfect at 12-0

PMG STAFF

NILES — No. 3-ranked Brandywine showed a little rust after not playing for 12 days.

But the Bobcats still had enough to dispose of Edwardsburg 52-23 in a girls basketball game Wednesday.

Josh Hood's team is now 12-0 with an average win margin of 36.4 points per game.

Lily Gill scored 13 of her game-high 20 points in the first half as the Bobcats raced out to a 28-10 halftime lead. Karleigh Byrd added 11 points, including a trio of 3-pointers.

Area scoring leader Shelby Laubach, who was averaging 22.0 points per game, was limited to 10 for the Eddies, now 6-7. Kya Shier added nine.

BRANDYWINE 52, EDWARDSBURG 23

EDWARDSBURG (23): Shelby Laubach 10, Reaghan Jenks 2, Kya Shier 9, Mallory Schrock 2, Shyann Thomas-Flanery 0. Totals 8 7-10 23.
BRANDYWINE (52): Hailey Smith 2, Karleigh Byrd 11, Zaya Price 4, MacKenna Price 9, Lily Gill 20, Allyanna Walker 1, Brook Brumitt 5. 20 6-8 52.

Edwardsburg	**6**	**10**	**15**	**23**
Brandywine	**12**	**28**	**44**	**52**

3-point baskets: Edwardsburg 0, Brandywine 6 (Byrd 3, Gill 2, Brumitt 1). Total fouls: Edwardsburg 7, Brandywine 13. Records: Edwardsburg 6-7, Brandywine 12-0.

Nick Shelton / For Leader Publications

Brandywine's Lily Gill pushes the ball up the floor during Wednesday's game against Edwardsburg.

Buchanan girls edge Lakeshore in overtime

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

STEVENSVILLE — The Buchanan Bucks defeated the Lakeshore Lancers 44-43 in overtime Thursday night.

Gabby Carson earned a double-double with 16 points and 14 rebounds and Reese Berry scored 16 points and added two assists while Justyce Cashier scored six points. Lakeshore's effort was led by Sydney Thomas and Avery Vroon, who scored 11 and 10 points respectively. Thomas also led the Lancers with five steals, while Vroon added seven rebounds.

The game was competitive throughout, with Buchanan holding an 8-point lead in the first quarter and Lakeshore battling back to take a lead in the fourth. Buchanan outscored Lakeshore 3-2 in the overtime period to secure the victory.

BUCHANAN 44, LAKESHORE 43 (OT)

Buchanan	**8**	**8**	**13**	**12**	**3**	**-**	**44**
Lakeshore	**11**	**7**	**8**	**15**	**2**	**-**	**43**

Buchanan (44)
Reese Berry 5-13 4-7 16, Harper Griffin 1-1 0-0 2, Aspen Berry 2-8 0-0 4, Justyce Cashier 2-8 1-2 6, Cora Weinberg 0-1 0-0 0, Gabby Carson 7-11 2-4 16. Totals 17-44 7-13 44
Lakeshore (43)
Samantha Little 1-3 1-1 3, Lila Schultz 4-12 0-2 8, Lucy Ashby 2-5 0-0 6, Sydney Thomas 3-9 4-5 11, Selena Gustafson 4-6 1-2 9, Avery Vroon 3-11 0-0 6. Totals 17-46 6-10 43
3-pointers:Buchanan Bucks 3 (R. Berry 2, Cashier 1), Lakeshore 3 (Ashby 2) Thomas 1)

Notre Dame announces 2026 football schedule

SUBMITTED

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Notre Dame Football has announced its schedule for the 2026 regular season, which will begin with the Shamrock Series game against Wisconsin at Lambeau Field and will conclude in Syracuse, New York against the Orange.

The Irish will face three Big Ten opponents and will take on six ACC members in addition to meetings with Navy, Rice, and the Big 12's BYU. Notre Dame will play five games with rivalry trophies (Michigan State, Purdue, Navy, Boston College and Stanford).

The Irish will begin the season away from home for the sixth-consecutive year, the longest such stint in program history.

The 2026 season marks the third consecutive year in which the Irish have at least two regular-season games taking place in an NFL Stadium.

September

SEPT. 6: Wisconsin (Shamrock Series) at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisc.

SEPT. 12: Rice at Notre Dame Stadium in Notre Dame, Ind.

SEPT. 19: Michigan State at Notre Dame Stadium in Notre Dame, Ind.

SEPT. 26: At Purdue at Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Ind.

October

OCT. 3: At North Carolina at Kenan Memorial Stadium in Chapel Hill, N.C.

OCT. 10: Stanford at Notre Dame Stadium in Notre Dame, Ind.

OCT. 17: At BYU at LaVell Edwards Stadium in Provo, Utah

Bye Week

OCT. 31: At Navy at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA

November

NOV. 7: Miami at Notre Dame Stadium in Notre Dame, Ind.

NOV. 14: Boston College at Notre Dame Stadium in Notre Dame, Ind.

NOV. 21: SMU at Notre Dame Stadium in Notre Dame, Ind.

NOV. 28: At Syracuse at JMA Wireless Dome in Syracuse, N.Y.

All game times are currently TBA.

Notre Dame Football's 2026 Shamrock Series game presented by Credit Union 1 will be played on Sunday, Sept. 6 against Wisconsin at Lambeau Field, home of the Green Bay Packers. The game, which was originally scheduled to be played in 2020 and was rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will be broadcast on NBC and Peacock. It is the second installment of a two-game series with Wisconsin, the first of which was played at Soldier Field in 2021 and ended with a 41-13 Notre Dame win. It is just the second meeting against the Badgers since 1964.

The Irish host Rice for the first time since 2014 on Sept. 12. It will be the sixth time the Owls and Irish have faced off against each other. Notre Dame is 5-0 all-time against Rice and 3-0 at Notre Dame Stadium.

The Megaphone Trophy rivalry will be renewed for the first time in nearly 10 years, when Michigan State returns to Notre Dame Stadium on Sept. 19. The Irish were victorious in the last meeting in 2017, 38-13 and hold a 49-29-1 advantage in the series.

The Shillelagh Trophy rivalry continues for the third straight season as the Irish travel to Ross-Ade Stadium to take on Purdue on Sept. 26. The last time these in-state rivals met in West Lafayette in 2024, Notre Dame took home a 66-7 win. The Irish are 61-26-2 all-time against Purdue and have won 10 straight against the Boilermakers.

The following week, Notre Dame will face North Carolina for the first time since 2022 in Chapel Hill, where the Irish won 45-32. The Irish are 21-2-0 all-time against the Tar Heels.

The Legends Trophy rivalry is renewed for the 39th time as Stanford returns to Notre Dame Stadium on Oct. 10. This rivalry game has been played every year (excluding 2020) since 1997. The Irish lead the all-time series 24-14.

Notre Dame takes the trip to Provo, Utah, on Oct. 17, to face the BYU Cougars for just the 10th time ever. The last time the two teams met was in the 2022 Shamrock Series at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada, where Notre Dame picked up the win over #16 BYU, 28-20.

This year's Notre Dame-Navy game will mark the 99th time the two sides have met. For the 60th time, the game will take place at a neutral site. It will be the first time the rivalry contest will be played at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts. It will also be Notre Dame's first game inside Gillette Stadium. The Irish lead the longstanding rivalry 84-13-1.

On Nov. 7, Miami returns to Notre Dame Stadium for the first time in 10 years. Notre Dame defeated Miami in that contest, 30-27, back in 2016. The Irish lead the all-time series against the Hurricanes 18-8-1. This is the first time since 1976 that Miami will travel to Notre Dame in the month of November. This will be the third-latest date into the calendar year the two teams will meet, with the latest coming on Nov. 20 1976.

The Irish take on Boston College for the 28th time on Nov. 14 for the latest installment of the Frank Leahy Memorial Bowl rivalry. The Eagles return to Notre Dame Stadium for the first time since 2022's snow-covered 44-0 shutout victory by the Irish. Notre Dame is 19-9-0 against Boston College all-time and holds a 9-5-0 edge in home contests against the Eagles.

Notre Dame and SMU meet Nov. 21 for the first time since 1989 when Notre Dame defeated the Mustangs, 59-6. It will be the first time the Irish take on SMU since they joined the ACC.

For the second consecutive season, the Irish face Syracuse when Notre Dame takes on the Orange on Nov 28. The Irish lead the all-time series 8-3, and will be just the fourth time Notre Dame has played in Syracuse, New York.

WRESTLING

From page B2

Hesson, Great Lakes District Wrestling Coach of the Year, emphasizes academics, just as his mentor did.

In 2024, National Wrestling Coaches Association awards for NJCAA Scholar All-Americans included five Roadrunners, Nathan Andrina, Hector Garcia, Hunter Heath, Colby Klinger and Vinny Patierno.

Last March 8, in Council Bluffs, Iowa, Hesson was selected National Wrestling Coaches Association Coach of the Year.

At the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs, the Roadrunners finished 14th in NJCAA Division I, with sophomores Colby Klinger and Nathan Andrina honored as All-Americans, joining Caeleb Ishmael from 2024, when SMC finished 17th in the country.

The past two seasons, SMC qualified the maximum 10 wrestlers for the national meet.

Hesson, who hopes to have his team practicing in the new space by mid-February, wants it named for Coach Judd "because he laid the foundation for everyone – myself included. He was a very impactful man, though I don't know if he realized it because he was just being himself."

"We met at 7 this morning for sprints," Hesson, 63, said. "I tell our kids all the time, 'I can't do what you're doing, but there was a time I did do that stuff, so I'm not asking you to do anything I haven't done.' "

The former city councilman's "big influence was off the mat, helping kids out and watching out for them. He was a well-rounded jack-of-all trades with a lot of life skills and a very smart guy who made sure everybody was taken care of to the best he could. It wasn't just wrestling.

"I've got some kids now who started out wrestling and aren't now, but they're still on campus, so I encourage them to stop in so I can help them get through things. If you have an opportunity to get an education, somehow, some way, it will pay off, not to mention all the memories.

"Academics is what we're here for. Those who thought they couldn't do college realize now that they can. Naming it for Coach Judd seems like the right thing to do, since this room will bring in more wrestlers. He was just a good man all the way around."

"It would be a great honor, and well-deserved," said Coach Judd's son, Todd, who wrestled for the Roadrunners with Hesson and followed his father into a career coaching and teaching physical education. "I thought it was pretty fitting."

Judd's not sure how his father would react because "he didn't like a lot of accolades," but believes he would be appreciative in his own humble way.

The number of wrestlers grew last fall with creation of a women's team guided by Ashley Courtney, from a prominent central Kentucky wrestling family.

Courtney wrestled for four years at a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) school, the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg.

Emily Schrock, manager of development and executive director of the SMC Foundation board, said, "We want to name the new wrestling room for Coach Judd once we reach the $200,000 goal. There are still alumni out there who appreciate Coach Judd and want to honor what he did for them.

"People I've spoken to thus far talk about how much he cared about his wrestlers, their well-being and that they were successful in school. I can definitely see those traits in Coach Hesson and how he runs his program now. Their passion for their students is a lifeline for them to stay in school and to succeed."

As they still say on the mats in homage to Judd's battle cry amid struggles, "Gotta Love It."

To give towards naming the SMC wrestling facility in honor of Coach Judd, visit givebutter.com/roomtogrow or contact Schrock at eschrock02@swmich.edu

Lions might have to make tough calls on contracts

By NOLAN BIANCHI
The Detroit News (TNS)

The Detroit Lions' 2023 draft class was widely criticized at the time, but a handful of years later, there's an argument to be made that it was the best haul of any team that spring – and that's despite the fact that three of the Lions' last four picks were off the roster before Week 1 of the 2025 season.

Now, it's time to open the wallet. The 2023 class becomes eligible for contract extensions this offseason.

The top-heavy class produced a few duds – including quarterback Hendon Hooker and defensive tackle Brodric Martin, who were both selected with third-round picks and have since joined at least two teams since being cut last summer. But those are easily overlooked when you consider the production they've gotten from running back Jahmyr Gibbs, linebacker Jack Campbell, tight end Sam LaPorta and defensive back Brian Branch.

Rounding out the group of extension-eligible players is fifth-round offensive lineman Colby Sorsdal, who will not be getting extended early. He's started just three games in his NFL career and missed the entire 2025 season with a leg injury.

Based on production alone, all four of the Lions' top picks in 2023 have an argument for resetting the market at their position. Let's get an early overview of each player's situation entering the 2026 offseason.

All salary cap figures and projections via OverTheCap.com.

Jahmyr Gibbs, RB (No. 12 overall, Alabama)

TOP OF RB MARKET: Saquon Barkley, Philadelphia Eagles ($20.6 million average annual value)

2026 CAP HIT: $5.7 million

FIFTH-YEAR OPTION (2027): $14.2 million

The Lions' run game was a disaster for large stretches of the 2025 season, but you'd never be able to tell by looking at Gibbs' final statline: He finished with 1,223 rushing yards (5.0 per carry), 616 receiving yards and 18 total touchdowns en route to making his third Pro Bowl in as many seasons.

Gibbs has been an electrifying talent from the day he stepped foot inside Ford Field, but now comes the uncomfortable part: Paying a running back large sums of money. This seems to be less of a quandary now than it was a couple of years ago, when league decision-makers were terrified to give out big contracts to running backs, a position where the wheels can quickly fall off after the miles pile up.

But in recent years, contracts for players like Barkley and San Francisco 49ers star Christian McCaffrey ($19 million AAV) have indicated that league sentiment is shifting. Given that Lions general manager Brad Holmes already spent a No. 12 pick on Gibbs and furiously defended the lack of "positional value" that he got from the pick, we're guessing that Holmes won't be afraid of paying Gibbs.

He'll compete with Atlanta Falcons back Bijan Robinson, who went four picks before Gibbs in 2023, for the chance to reset the market. Gibbs, 23, is six years younger than Barkley, 29, and seven years younger than McCaffrey, 30, and both players have been studs into their late 20s, so there shouldn't be any true concerns over whether Gibbs will be able to hold up over the length of the contract.

Jack Campbell, LB (No. 18, Iowa)

TOP OF ILB MARKET: Fred Warner, San Francisco 49ers ($21 million AAV)

2026 CAP HIT: $4.7 million

FIFTH-YEAR OPTION (2027): $23 million

Campbell was the biggest bright spot of a Lions defense that completely fell apart down the stretch. He was named First Team All-Pro for the first time in his career after finishing with 176 total tackles, five sacks, three forced fumbles and nine tackles for loss.

It took Campbell some time to acclimate to the NFL, which isn't a surprise; linebacker is a supremely demanding position both physically and mentally. But while he was the latest bloomer of this four-player group, he could arguably have the highest ceiling.

It wouldn't be surprising if Campbell, 25, did end up with a market-resetting contract, and frankly, it should be expected. His development was slow and steady until it became undeniable this past season, when he was nationally recognized as one of the best players at his position. The every-down nature of his position gives him a chance to impact the game on every defensive snap, and as the captain and signal-caller for the defense, he plays a massive role for both the defensive line and secondary.

Campbell's fifth-year option (for the 2027 season) is set at nearly $23 million, which can be reduced if the Lions structure his extension around it.

Sam LaPorta, TE (No. 34, Iowa)

TOP OF TE MARKET: George Kittle, San Francisco 49ers ($19.1 million AAV)

2026 CAP HIT: $6.6 million

Before suffering season-ending injuries, it seemed likely that LaPorta and Branch would be the top priorities this offseason. Both players are clearly among the best at their positions and have only one season remaining on their four-year rookie deals. The urgency is clear.

But both are now in precarious situations due to injuries, with LaPorta suffering a herniated disc that required surgery. The back is not expected to linger into next season, but it's an injury that undoubtedly lowers confidence in the long-term outlook of a player.

Injuries aside, LaPorta should be in consideration for a market-resetting extension. He was averaging a career-best 54.3 yards per game through nine games and has 20 touchdown receptions over 42 career games. His receiving production hasn't quite matched like Arizona's Trey McBride ($19 million AAV), who's surpassed 1,100 yards in each of his last two seasons. In LaPorta's best receiving season, he caught 86 passes for 889 yards and 10 touchdowns. But one could argue that's mainly due to a lack of volume, since Detroit's offense had more playmakers on it than the Cardinals'.

On the flip side, waiting could hurt Detroit: the offensive coordinator who helped McBride explode onto the scene is Drew Petzing, who's now in Detroit. If the Lions make LaPorta a focal point of the offense without first signing him to a new contract, it could cost them a few million on the back end.

Brian Branch, DB (No. 45, Alabama)

TOP OF S MARKET: Kyle Hamilton, Baltimore Ravens ($25.1 million AAV)

2026 CAP HIT: $6.4 million

Like LaPorta, Branch has been a star from the minute he stepped onto the practice field for rookie minicamp. Also like LaPorta, he has a significant injury clouding his future. Branch's torn Achilles, which he suffered in Week 14, is expected to impact his availability for at least the start of training camp and potentially a significant portion of the regular season.

The concerns about Branch's injury, and what it might cost to extend him, are compounded by the fact that Detroit briefly made Kerby Joseph, who missed more than half of last season with a perplexing knee injury, the NFL's highest-paid safety last offseason. The idea of committing $40 million annually to a pair of players with shaky health is worrisome.

But that conundrum is actually less scary because of the way the Lions structured Joseph's contract ($21.3 million annually). By 2028, the hypothetical second year of Branch's contract extension, the Lions will be able to move off Joseph with minimal penalty.

All things considered, I'd expect Branch to be extended sometime next season – there's a benefit for him to wait, too – after the Lions can confirm there are no lingering effects from the Achilles. And as other safeties in the league have seemingly passed him by in terms of acclaim, they might be able to do it without resetting the market entirely, especially with Hamilton's annual figure of $25.1 million sitting so far above the second-highest-paid player, Joseph.

UM's new special teams coach gets down to business

By ANGELIQUE S. CHENGELIS
The Detroit News (TNS)

Kerry Coombs has had a unique experience since being hired as Michigan special teams coordinator nearly two months ago.

Coombs was hired by former head coach Sherrone Moore on Dec. 6, and four days later, Moore was fired after the university found evidence he was having a relationship with a staff member.

Coombs remained on staff through the bowl game, and after Michigan hired Kyle Whittingham on Dec. 26, Coombs was one of three coaches retained from the previous staff.

"It has been quite a whirlwind for me right from the that first week in December to now," Coombs said Wednesday on the "In the Trenches" podcast with Jon Jansen.

Coombs shared how he met with Moore on Dec. 5, was and was offered the job the next day. On Dec. 7, he ran the special teams meeting, and handled practice Monday and Tuesday.

"And then Wednesday, we had a coaching change – you can't make that up," Coombs said on the podcast. "So it was really interesting. I hadn't known coach Moore before I got here. I knew (running backs coach) Tony Alford because I coached with him before (at Ohio State), and really, that was it. It instantly became this huge vacuum, right?

"But it worked out that I'm getting to stay. I'm very excited about that, and so that that first month was like no month I've ever had my career. But now we're back to normal."

Michigan had struggled on special teams last season and Moore fired JB Brown, which created the opening for Coombs.

"The thing was that they had struggled, and they knew they had struggled," Coombs said. "There were some things that were easy for me to see having done this for quite a while. The meetings were too long. The time on the field relative to special teams, frankly, was too long. There's not a single kid that came to the University of Michigan to play right guard on punt.

"And if you don't make it exciting, and you don't make it interesting and you don't keep it pretty brief, you're going to lose them, and they're not going to want to play, and they're not going to want to perform. They'll do it because they're part of the team, but you got to get them excited about doing it, and that's one of the big challenges of special teams.

Coombs' philosophy has been to keep things simple, including fundamentals and technique.

"And that's what we did and made it very simple for the bowl game, and the kids kind of latched on to it and played so hard," he said. "They practiced hard, they embraced it. And even in the midst of all that chaos, which, you know, if you're a young person, that was – for me – it was chaotic.

"I've been around the bend a time or two, but for those kids, that was something else, and for them to be able to focus on those the particulars in special teams was remarkable to me. And I was really pleased with how they played those three weeks."

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0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
Cass COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO. and JUDGE
2025-00318-DE

Court address Court & telephone no.
Law & Courts Building, 60296 M-62, Cassopolis, MI 49031

Estate of: Daniel Scott Kirwan, Deceased
Date of birth:* 05/07/1962

TO ALL CREDITORS:**

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Daniel Scott Kirwan, died 03/21/2019. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Mai Vo Kirwan, personal representative, or to both the probate court at Law & Courts Building, 60296 M-62, Cassopolis, MI 49031 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: 12/09/2025

Jeffrey R. Holmstrom P29405
Attorney name Bar no.
830 Pleasant Street, Ste 100
Address
St. Joseph, MI 49085
City, state, zip
269-983-0755
Telephone no.

Mai Vo Kirwan
Personal representative
6614 Pondview Drive
Address
Tinley Park, IL 60477
City, state, zip
312-622-2924
Telephone no.

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
CASS COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO.
2025-344-DE

Estate of Rajesh Kumar Nakrani
Date of birth:12/06/1979

TO ALL CREDITORS: *

NOTICE TO CREDITORS:
The decedent, Rajesh Kumar Nakrani, died 09/27/2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Lori Nakrani, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 60296 M62 St. 10, Cassopolis, MI 49031 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: 01/22/2026

Jeffrey P. Ray P31098
Attorney name Bar no.
741 N. Cedar St., Ste 101-A
Address
Lansing, MI 48906
City, state, zip
517-372-5700
Telephone

Lori Nakrani
Personal representative
2025 Henniker Street
Address
Apex, NC 27523
City, state, zip
989-869-6716
Telephone

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
CASS COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO.
2025-366-DE
JUDGE
Hon. Carol M. Bealor

Estate of:
Willis Carl Brown
Date of birth: 07/28/1920

TO ALL CREDITORS: *
Including any unknown, creditors of Decedent

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Willis Carl Brown, died 09/21/2003. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Frederick Brown and Russell Brown, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 60296 M-62, Cassopolis, MI 49031 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date 01/23/2026

Stephen K. Woods P54528
Attorney name Bar no.
156 South Broadway
Address
Cassopolis, MI 49031
City, state, zip
269-445-2658
Telephone

Frederick Brown and Russell Brown
Personal representative
25611 Redford Rd.& 71145 State Line Rd.
Address
Edwardsburg, MI 49112
City, state, zip
574-215-6504 & 574-214-9755
Telephone

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
BERRIEN COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO. and JUDGE
2026-0009-DE-R

Court address:
811 Port Street, St. Joseph, Michigan 49085
Court phone no.
269-983-7111

Estate of Larry Lee Richter Jr., deceased
Date of birth: 05/29/1962

TO ALL CREDITORS: **

NOTICE TO CREDITORS:
The decedent, Larry Lee Richter Jr., died 10/07/2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Camaro Redding personal representative, or to both the probate court at 811 Port Street, St. Joseph, Michigan 49085 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: 01/26/2026

Attorney: John R. Colip
Bar no. P25250
12 Longmeadow Village Drive, Suite 100
Niles, MI 49120
269-591-6915

Camaro Redding
Personal representative(s)
6041 Buffalo Road
Galien, MI 49113
574-286-3910

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
CASS COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO.
2026-001-DE
JUDGE
Hon. Carol M. Bealor

Estate of:
James Blair Lindley, Deceased
Date of birth: 06/12/1951

TO ALL CREDITORS: *

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, James Blair Lindley, died 08/17/2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Adam Lindley, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 25054 Kenneth Ave., Edwardsburg, MI 49112 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date 01/26/2026

Robert J. Dutka P27761
Attorney name Bar no.
57635 N. Main St. P.O. Box 461
Address
Three Rivers, MI 49093
City, state, zip
269-273-8402
Telephone

Adam Lindley
Personal representative
25054 Kenneth Ave.
Address
Edwardsburg, MI 49112
City, state, zip
574-520-7434
Telephone

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF BERRIEN

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE AND CREDITORS NOTICE

FILE NO
2026-016-DE

ESTATE OF WINNIE LEE GWINN
Date of Birth: June 4, 1949

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS including creditors and heirs of the deceased whose address(es) are unknown and whose interest in the matter may be barred or affected by the following:

Be advised that a Petition for Determination of Heirs has been filed with the Court and a hearing on said Petition will be held on March 3, 2026, at 09:00 A.M. via Zoom through the Cass County Law and Courts Building, 60296 M62, Cassopolis, Michigan 49031

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The Decedent, Winnie Lee Gwinn, who lived at 2523 Lakeshore Drive, Niles, Michigan, died November 20, 2025.

Creditors of the Decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Rebecca Miller, named personal representative, or to the probate court at 60296 M62, Cassopolis Michigan 49031 and the named personal representative within four (4) months after the date of publication of this notice.

January 31, 2026

Robert L. Landgraf, Jr. (P23000)
Attorney
Post Office Box 1310
Niles, Michigan 49120
(269) 683 - 8300

Rebecca Miller
Petitioner
c/o Post Office Box 1310
Niles, Michigan 49120-1310

Notice is hereby given that the Howard Charter Township Board will consider adoption of Proposed Ordinance No. 236, entitled the "Howard Charter Township Safe Burning Ordinance," at a regular meeting of the Township Board. The proposed ordinance would rescind Ordinance No. 221 and regulate outdoor burning within Howard Charter Township. The ordinance sets forth requirements and restrictions for outdoor burning, including permitted materials, hours, setback distances, safety conditions, and permit requirements for commercial and non-commercial burning. The proposed ordinance provides for enforcement by the Fire Chief and designated Township officials, authorizes inspections, assigns liability for fire suppression and damages, and establishes civil penalties for violations.
If adopted, the ordinance shall take effect 30 days after publication. A copy of the proposed ordinance is available for public inspection at the Howard Charter Township Office during regular business hours.

White Space Sells

0900 LEGALS

Notice of Self Storage Sale
Please take notice Just Simple Storage - Menominee located at N710 County Rd 577, Menoninee, MI, 49858 intends to hold an Auction of storage units in default of payment. The sale will occur as an Online auction at www.bid13.com on 2/19/2026 at 12:00 PM. Unless stated otherwise the description of the contents are household goods, furnishings and garage essentials. Victor Odegaard. This sale may be withdrawn at any time without notice. 7528-333172

Notice of Self Storage Sale
Please take notice **Aloha Storage located at 3001 South 11th Street, Niles, MI, 49120** intends to hold an Auction of storage units in default of payment. The **sale will occur at the facility on 2/20/2026 at 12:00 PM.** Unless stated otherwise the description of the contents are household goods, furnishings and garage essentials. Christina Turnbo. This sale may be withdrawn at any time without notice.

Notice of Self Storage Sale
Please take notice **Aloha Storage located at 3001 South 11th Street, Niles, MI, 49120** intends to hold an Auction of storage units in default of payment. The **sale will occur at the facility on 2/16/2026 at 12:00 PM.** Unless stated otherwise the description of the contents are household goods, furnishings and garage essentials. Carl D. Hendrix. This sale may be withdrawn at any time without notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Jefferson Township Board of Trustees Regular Meeting Synopsis, January 13, 2026
Supervisor Hass called the January 13, 2026, meeting to order at 6:30 PM with board **members present:** Brunner, Bundle, Gillam, Hass, Mendenhall.
REGULAR MEETING BOARD ACTION
• December 11, 2025, meeting minutes were approved.
•Treasurer's Report was given.
•Payment of bills was authorized.
Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Brunner, Clerk

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE RE:
Sale by Online Auction of Contents of Self-Storage Unit
To all interested persons, including, Michael C. Pollard
Take Notice: The Contents of Storage Unit #66, located at Diamond Lake Self Storage, 22954 Diamond Cove Road, Cassopolis, Michigan 49031, will be sold via online auction, **beginning Feb 14, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. through Feb 23, 2026, at 3:00 p.m., on storagetreasures.com**. Items to be sold will have pictures posted on Storagetreasures.com

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PUBLICATION NOTICE
In the Matter of the Rouse Trust Social Security No. xxx-xx- 7839
TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS;
Your interest in the property of the deceased may be barred or affected by this Notice.
NOTICE: Please take notice that Dorothy B. Rouse died on December 10, 2025, At the time of death, there were no assets requiring administration through Court proceedings. All assets were jointly held, had designed succession or were part of the Rouse Trust. James D. Rouse is the Trustee. The deceased lived at 612 S. Saint Joseph Avenue, Niles, MI 49120.
Creditors of the deceased are notified that all claims against the deceased will be forever barred unless presented to the Trustee or the attorney for the Trust or to both within four (4) months of the date of publication of this Notice. Notice is further given that the Trust assets will then be assigned to persons designated in the Trust.
Dated: January 20, 2026

John R. Colip (P25250)
12 Longmeadow Village Drive, Suite 100
Niles, MI 49120
Phone: (269) 695-3849

James D. Rouse
612 S. Saint Joseph Ave
Niles, MI 49120
Phone: (269) 449-5867

Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement
Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM, on March 4, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information:
Name(s) of the mortgagor(s): Andrea DePoy, a single woman
Original Mortgagee: Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for lender and lender's successors and/or assigns Foreclosing Assignee (if any): Rocket Mortgage, LLC f/k/a Quicken Loans, LLC
Date of Mortgage: March 21, 2022
Date of Mortgage Recording: March 28, 2022
Amount claimed due on date of notice: $208,133.61
Description of the mortgaged premises: Situated in Village of Edwardsburg, Cass County, Michigan, and described as: Lot 2 in Pleasant Place Addition to the Village of Edwardsburg, according to the plat thereof recorded in Liber 1-F of Plats, Page 283, Cass County Records. Common street address (if any): 27100 US Highway 12, Edwardsburg, MI 49112-9680
The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a; or, if the subject real property is used for agricultural purposes as defined by MCL 600.3240(16).
If the property is sold at foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of the Revised Judicature Act of 1961, pursuant to MCL 600.3278 the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period.
Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice.
This notice is from a debt collector.
Date of notice: January 31, 2026
Trott Law, P.C.
31440 Northwestern Hwy, Suite 145
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
(248) 642-2515 1583008 (01-31)(02-21)

The Berrien Springs-Oronoko Township Police Department (an equal opportunity employer), located in central Berrien County, MI, is seeking qualified applicants for the position of Chief of Police.
The Department offers 24 hour/7-day coverage of the 36 square miles of service area. 9 sworn officers (including the Chief) and an administrative assistant comprise the department. A School/Community Resource Officer is contracted with Berrien Springs Public Schools. Several reserves and volunteers assist in various ways as well.
Oronoko Charter Township, which includes the Village of Berrien Springs, has a 2020 census population of approximately 9200. That number increases during the school year due to the presence of approximately 3000 students at Andrews University, a Seventh day Adventist institution of higher learning. The University is culturally diverse and maintains an airpark. The community features abundant orchards, vineyards, wineries, and farmland and is rather rural in character. Some business and light industrial manufacturing exists near downtown Berrien Springs. The Berrien County Youth Fair offers year-round activities and is busy in the summer months with horse shows and the annual youth fair. The Township looks forward to development potential along M139 at the US 31 interchange.
The position is salaried exempt. Compensation is commensurate with experience and begins at $80,000, plus a competitive benefit package.
Full job description can be found online at www.oronokotownship.org.
Applications and resumes are due on or before February 9, 2026, and will be received at:
Oronoko Charter Township
Attn: Supervisor
P.O. Box 214, Berrien Springs, MI 49103
Email: supervisor@oronokotownship.org

Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice.
Notice of foreclosure by advertisement. Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM on MARCH 4, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information.
Default has been made in the conditions of a mortgage made by Pamela Mersereau, unmarried woman, to Fifth Third Bank, National Association, Mortgagee, dated November 2, 2022 and recorded November 18, 2022 in Liber 1226, Page 465 Cass County Records, Michigan. There is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of Forty-Three Thousand Sixty-Six and 91/100 Dollars ($43,066.91).
Under the power of sale contained in said mortgage and the statute in such case made and provided, notice is hereby given that said mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at public venue at the place of holding the circuit court within Cass County, Michigan at 10:00 AM on MARCH 4, 2026.
Said premises are located in the City of Dowagiac, Cass County Michigan, and are described as:
Lot 114, Hopkin's Addition to the City of Dowagiac, Cass County, Michigan, according to the plat thereof recorded in Liber 1 of Plats, Page 16, Cass County Records.
401 1st Ave, Dowagiac, Michigan 49047
The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCLA §600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale.
If the property is sold at foreclosure sale, pursuant to MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damage to the property during the redemption period.
Dated: January 31, 2026
File No. 26-000070
Firm Name: Orlans Law Group PLLC
Firm Address: 1650 West Big Beaver Road, Troy MI 48084
Firm Phone Number: (248) 502.1400 (01-31)(02-21)

Cassopolis Public Schools is soliciting sealed bids for renovations to its Sam Adams Elementary School Playground and Ross Beatty High School Kitchen. Sealed bids must be received at Cassopolis Public Schools, 22721 Diamond Cove Street, Cassopolis, MI 49031, prior to 12:00 PM, on Monday, February 23, 2026; at which time bids will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids will not be accepted after 12:00 PM. Bids must be marked on the envelope, "Sam Adams Playground Renovation" or "Ross Beatty HS Kitchen Renovation" and the bidder's name must be identified on the envelope. Bids should be addressed to Cassopolis Public Schools, Attn: Dr. John Ritzler, 22721 Diamond Cove Street, Cassopolis, MI 49031. Cassopolis Public Schools reserves the right to accept or reject all or any portion of a bid and is not bound to accept the low bid. A bid may be rejected, if not accompanied by data required by the Bidding Documents, or which is in any way incomplete or irregular. All bids shall be accompanied by a sworn statement disclosing any familial relationship that exists between the owner(s) or any employee of the bidder and any member of the Board of Education of the School District or the Superintendent of the School District. The Board of Education shall not accept a bid that does not include a sworn and notarized familial relationship disclosure statement. All bids shall be accompanied by Affidavit of Compliance – Iran Economic Sanctions Act in compliance with "Iran linked business" within the meaning of the Iran Economic Sanctions Act, Michigan Public Act No. 517 of 2012. The Board of Education shall not accept a bid that does not include the Affidavit of Compliance. Cassopolis Public Schools shall have the right to accept a bid which, in the judgment of Cassopolis Public Schools, is in the best interests of Cassopolis Public Schools. Bidding documents may be viewed at www.gmb.com under "Bid Sets" after January 21, 2026. For more information go to "Requests for Proposals" online at http://www.cassopolis.k12.mi.us/district_/budget_salary_compensation_transparency_reportin

SHORT FORECLOSURE NOTICE - CASS COUNTY Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement. Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM, on March 04, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. MORTGAGE: Mortgagor(s): Francis E. Starr, a single man and Barbara E. Hartsell, a single woman Original Mortgagee: Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc. ("MERS"), solely as nominee for lender and lender`s successors and assigns Date of mortgage: March 7, 2002 Recorded on March 11, 2002, Liber 813, on Page 97, and re-recorded via Affidavit of Correction on November 20, 2017, Liber 1131, on Page 2055, and re-recorded via Loan Modification recorded on October 18, 2016 in Liber 1113, on Page 817 Foreclosing Assignee (if any): Selene Finance LP Amount claimed to be due at the date hereof: Fifty-One Thousand Two Hundred Eighty-One and 40/100 Dollars ($51,281.40) Mortgaged premises: Situated in Cass County, and described as: COMMENCING AT THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF THE NORTH HALF OF THE SOUTHEAST QUARTER SECTION 16, TOWN 7 SOUTH, RANGE 16 WEST, THENCE NORTH 88 DEGREES 50 MINUTES EAST 10.44 1/2 CHAINS; THENCE NORTH 1 DEGREE WEST 1.436 CHAINS; THENCE SOUTH 88 DEGREES 50 MINUTES WEST 10.44 1/2 CHAINS; THENCE SOUTH 1 DEGREE EAST 1.436 CHAINS TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING. Commonly known as 1453 Barron Lake Rd, Niles, MI 49120 The redemption period will be 6 month from the date of such sale, unless abandoned under MCL 600.3241a, in which case the redemption period will be 30 days from the date of such sale, or 15 days from the MCL 600.3241a(b) notice, whichever is later; or unless extinguished pursuant to MCL 600.3238. If the above referenced property is sold at a foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of Act 236 of 1961, under MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice. Selene Finance LP Mortgagee/Assignee Schneiderman & Sherman P.C. 23938 Research Dr, Suite 300 Farmington Hills, MI 48335 248.539.7400
1583436 (01-31)(02-21)

Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement
Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM, on March 4, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information:
Name(s) of the mortgagor(s): Tia Howard, an unmarried woman
Original Mortgagee: Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for lender and lender's successors and/or assigns Foreclosing Assignee (if any): Lake Michigan Credit Union
Date of Mortgage: November 2, 2012
Date of Mortgage Recording: November 7, 2012
Amount claimed due on date of notice: $41,234.27
Description of the mortgaged premises: Situated in City of Dowagiac, Cass County, Michigan, and described as: Commencing at the Northwest corner of and at the intersection of the North line of Telegraph Street and the West line of Hamilton Street in Hamilton's Addition to City of Dowagiac; thence West on the North line of Telegraph Street, 92 feet; thence North 8 rods; thence East 92 feet to the West line of Hamilton Street; thence South on the West line of Hamilton Street 8 rods to beginning.
Also commencing 4 rods West of the Northwest corner of Lot 223, Patrick Hamilton's Addition to the City of Dowagiac; thence running West 8 rods; thence South 4 rods; thence East 8 rods to Hamilton Street; thence North along West line of Hamilton Street, 4 rods to beginning.
Common street address (if any): 302 W Telegraph St, Dowagiac, MI 49047-1132
The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a; or, if the subject real property is used for agricultural purposes as defined by MCL 600.3240(16).
If the property is sold at foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of the Revised Judicature Act of 1961, pursuant to MCL 600.3278 the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period.
Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice.
This notice is from a debt collector.
Date of notice: January 31, 2026
Trott Law, P.C.
31440 Northwestern Hwy, Suite 145
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
(248) 642-2515 1582760 (01-31)(02-21)

ROBERTSON, ANSCHUTZ, SCHNEID, CRANE & PARTNERS, PLLC, MAY BE DEEMED A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT. ANY INFORMATION WE OBTAIN WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE AT 13010 Morris Road, Suite 450, Alpharetta, GA 30004 ph:470-321-7112 Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice. Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in CASS County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM on February 25, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information: Name(s) of the mortgagor(s): MATTHEW SWISHER. Default has been made in the conditions of a Mortgage made by MATTHEW SWISHER to MORTGAGE ELECTRONIC REGISTRATION SYSTEMS, INC., AS NOMINEE FOR MORTGAGE RESEARCH CENTER, LLC DBA VETERANS UNITED HOME LOANS, original Mortgagee, for a mortgage dated July 27, 2023, and recorded on August 08, 2023 in Liber 1235 Page 2027 in the Register of Deeds in and for Cass County. Said mortgage was assigned by said Mortgagee to PLANET HOME LENDING, LLC as documented by an assignment of mortgage dated March 12, 2025, and recorded on March 12, 2025, in Liber 1257 Page 1059 in the Register of Deeds in and for Cass County, on which Mortgage there is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of $306,311.64. Under the power of sale contained in said Mortgage and the statute in such case made and provided, notice is hereby given that said Mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at public venue, at the place of holding the Circuit Court within CASS County, Michigan on February 25, 2026 at 10:00 AM. Said premises are located in the city of DOWAGIAC in CASS County, Michigan and are described as: LAND SITUATED IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN, COUNTY OF CASS, CITY OF DOWAGIAC: LOT 224 AND 1 ROD OFF THE SOUTH SIDE OF LOT 225, IN PATRICK HAMILTON'S FOURTH ADDITION TO THE VILLAGE (NOW CITY) OF DOWAGIAC, CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN. Property Address: 106 HAMILTON ST. DOWAGIAC MI, 49047 Tax ID No. 14-160-200-492-00 The redemption period shall be Six (6) months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale. If this property is sold at foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of the Revised Judicature Act of 1961, pursuant to MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the Mortgage sale or to the Mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. PLANET HOME LENDING, LLC Mortgagee/Assignee January 24, 2026, ROBERTSON, ANSCHUTZ, SCHNEID, CRANE & PARTNERS, PLLC Attorney for Mortgagee/Assignee 13010 Morris Road, Suite 450 Alpharetta, GA 30004 Telephone: 470-321-7112 Facsimile: 404-393-1425 Service Email: MIFCLTeam@raslg.com (01-24)(02-14)

Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement Notice of foreclosure by advertisement. Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM on 2/25/2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. Names of Mortgagor(s): Jamie Stockton. Original mortgagee: Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for Strong Home Mortgage, LLC. Date of mortgage: 8/1/2023. Mortgage recorded on 8/10/2023 as Document No. 205443, in Liber 1235, Page 2286. Foreclosing Assignee (if any): Rocket Mortgage, LLC f/k/a Quicken Loans, LLC. Amount claimed to be due at the date hereof: $199,202.63 Mortgaged premises: Situated in Cass County, and described as: LAND SITUATED IN THE TOWNSHIP OF MILTON, COUNTY OF CASS, STATE OF MICHIGAN, IS DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS: BEGINNING AT THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF LOT NUMBER 15, IRONWOOD HEIGHTS, MILTON TOWNSHIP, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF AS RECORDED IN LIBER 1-H OF PLATS, PAGE 391; THENCE NORTH 88 DEGREES 57 MINUTES 00 SECONDS WEST, ALONG THE EXTENSION OF THE SOUTH LINE OF SAID LOT 15, 200.00 FEET; THENCE NORTH PARALLEL WITH THE WEST ONE-EIGHTH LINE OF SAID SECTION, 200.00 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 88 DEGREES 57 MINUTES 00 SECONDS EAST, 200.00 FEET TO A POINT ON THE WEST LINE OF LOT 14 OF SAID SUBDIVISION; THENCE SOUTH ALONG THE WEST LINE OF SAID LOTS 14 AND 15 OF SAID SUBDIVISION, 200.00 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING, BEING IN THE SECTION 7, TOWNSHIP 8 SOUTH, RANGE 16 WEST, COUNTY OF CASS, STATE OF MICHIGAN. TOGETHER WITH A NON-EXCLUSIVE EASEMENT BEING MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS: TOGETHER WITH THE RIGHT OF INGRESS AND EGRESS TO AND FROM SAID PROPERTY OVER AND ACROSS A 66-FOOT-WIDE PRIVATE ROAD LYING SOUTH OF AND ADJACENT TO THE ABOVE-DESCRIBED PROPERTY AND EXTENDING EASTERLY TO IRONWOOD DRIVE. Commonly known as 33764 Judy Lane, Niles, MI 49120. The redemption period will be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless the property is abandoned or used for agricultural purposes. If the property is determined abandoned under MCL 600.3241a, the redemption period will be 30 days from the date of such sale, or 15 days after the statutory notice, whichever is later. If the property is determined abandoned under MCL 600.3241, the redemption period will be 1 month from the date of such sale. If the property is presumed to be used for agricultural purposes pursuant to MCL 600.3240(16), the redemption period is 1 year from the date of such sale. The redemption period may be extinguished pursuant to MCL 600.3238. If the above referenced property is sold at a foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of Act 236 of 1961, under MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice. Date of Notice: 01/24/2026. Codilis & Moody, P.C. 15W030 North Frontage Road, Suite 100 Burr Ridge, IL 60527 (313) 536-2500. This law firm is a debt collector. C&M File 23-25-00574 (01-24)(02-14)

People Do Read
Small Ads. You Did!

Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice.
Notice of foreclosure by advertisement. Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM on MARCH 4, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information.
Default has been made in the conditions of a mortgage made by Lucas Stover and Ashley Stover, husband and wife, as tenants by the entirety, to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as nominee for Zillow Home Loans, LLC, Mortgagee, dated August 11, 2023 and recorded August 21, 2023 in Liber 1236, Page 705 Cass County Records, Michigan. Said mortgage is now held by NewRez LLC, by assignment. There is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of Two Hundred Fourteen Thousand Two Hundred Forty-Five and 80/100 Dollars ($214,245.80).
Under the power of sale contained in said mortgage and the statute in such case made and provided, notice is hereby given that said mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at public venue at the place of holding the circuit court within Cass County, Michigan at 10:00 AM on MARCH 4, 2026.
Said premises are located in the Township of Ontwa, Cass County Michigan, and are described as:
Lot(s) 1 of EAGLE HEIGHTS according to the plat thereof recorded in Liber 1-E of Plats, Page 268 of Cass County Records.
69002 Brady Rd, Edwardsburg, Michigan 49112
The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCLA §600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale.
If the property is sold at foreclosure sale, pursuant to MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damage to the property during the redemption period.
Dated: January 31, 2026
File No. 26-000493
Firm Name: Orlans Law Group PLLC
Firm Address: 1650 West Big Beaver Road, Troy MI 48084
Firm Phone Number: (248) 502.1400 (01-31)(02-21)

NOTICE OF DEFAULT AND FORECLOSURE SALE
WHEREAS, on August 4, 2006, a certain Adjustable-Rate Home Equity Conversion Mortgage was executed by Ellie Joe Harris, Jr., as mortgagor, in favor of Financial Freedom Senior Funding Corporation, a subsidiary of Indy Mac Bank, F.S.B., as mortgagee, which was recorded August 14, 2006, at Liber 00942, Page 1019, Cass County Records; and,
WHEREAS the mortgage was insured by the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (the "Secretary") pursuant to the National Housing Act for the purpose of providing single family housing; and,
WHEREAS the mortgage is now owned by the Secretary, through mesne assignments as documented by an Assignment of Mortgage, dated April 25, 2003, and recorded May 2, 2023, at Liber 1231, Page 2597, Cass County Records; and,
WHEREAS, a default has been made in the covenants and conditions of the Mortgage in that the mortgagor is deceased and the property described below is not the principal residence of at least one surviving Borrower; and
WHEREAS, the entire amount delinquent as of December 3, 2025, is $161,427.51; and
WHEREAS, by virtue of this default, the Secretary has declared the entire amount of the indebtedness secured by the mortgage to be immediately due and payable;
NOW THEREFORE, pursuant to powers vested in me by the Single Family Mortgage Foreclosure Act of 1994, 12 U.S.C. § 3751 et seq., by 24 CFR part 27, subpart B, and by the Secretary's designation of me as Foreclosure Commissioner, recorded on September 26, 2016 at Liber 1112, Page 708, Cass County Records, notice is hereby given that on **Wednesday, March 4, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.** local time, the real property located in the Township of Milton, County of Cass, State of Michigan, the below described will be sold at public auction to the highest bidder:
Commencing South 00 degrees 09 minutes 55 seconds East 977 feet from West 1/4 corner; thence North 00 degrees 09 minutes 55 seconds West 258.75 feet; thence South 89 degrees 59 minutes 19 seconds East 280. 75 feet; thence South 00 degrees 09 minutes 55 seconds East 258.75 feet; thence North 89 degrees 59 minutes 19 seconds West 280.75 feet to beginning. Section 9.
Commonly known as: 461 Gumwood Rd.
Tax Parcel No: 14-070-009-017-01
The sale will be held at the Cass County Circuit Courthouse, which is located at 60296 M-62, Cassopolis, Michigan.
The Secretary of Housing and Urban Development will bid $166,369.75.
There will be no proration of taxes, rents or other income or liabilities, except that the purchaser will pay, at or before closing, their pro rata share of any real estate taxes that have been paid by the Secretary to the date of the foreclosure sale.
When making their bids, all bidders, except the Secretary, must submit a deposit totaling $16,636.98 [10% of the Secretary's bid] in the form of a certified check or cashier's check, made payable to the Secretary of HUD. A deposit need not accompany each oral bid. If the successful bid is oral, a deposit of $16,636.98 must be presented before the bidding is closed. The deposit is nonrefundable. The remainder of the purchase price must be delivered within 30 days of the sale or at such other time as the Secretary may determine for good cause shown, time being of the essence. This amount, like the bid deposits, must be delivered in the form of a certified or cashier's check. If the Secretary is the high bidder, he/she/they need not pay the bid amount in cash. The successful bidder will pay all conveying fees, all real estate and other taxes that are due on or after the delivery date of the remainder of the payment and all other costs associated with the transfer of title. At the conclusion of the sale, the deposits of the unsuccessful bidders will be returned to them.
The Secretary may grant an extension of time within which to deliver the remainder of the payment. All extensions will be for 15-day increments for a fee of $500.00, paid in advance. The extension fee shall be in the form of a certified or cashiers check made payable to the Secretary of HUD. If the high bidder closes the sale prior to the expiration of any extension period, the unused portion of the extension fee shall be applied toward the amount due.
If the high bidder is unable to close the sale within the required period, or within any extensions of time granted by the Secretary, the high bidder may be required to forfeit the cash deposit or, at the election of the Foreclosure Commissioner after consultation with the HUD representative, will be liable to HUD for any costs incurred as a result of such failure. The Commissioner may, at the direction of the HUD Representative, offer the Property to the second highest bidder for an amount equal to the highest price offered by that bidder.
There is no right of redemption, or right of possession based upon a right of redemption, in the mortgagor or others subsequent to a foreclosure completed pursuant to the Act. Therefore, the Foreclosure Commissioner will issue a Deed to the purchaser upon receipt of the entire purchase price in accordance with the terms of the sale, as provided herein. HUD does not guarantee that the property will be vacant.
The scheduled foreclosure sale shall be cancelled or adjourned if it is established, by documented written application of the mortgagor to the Foreclosure Commissioner not less than 3 days before the date of sale, or otherwise, that the default or defaults upon which the foreclosure is based did not exist at the time of service of this notice of default and foreclosure sale, or all amounts due under the mortgage agreement are tendered to the Foreclosure Commissioner, in the form of a certified or cashier's check payable to the Secretary of HUD, before public auction of the property is completed.
The mortgage cannot be "reinstated" prior to sale, as the event triggering acceleration was not a default in payments. Payment of the entire outstanding balance of the mortgage debt is required to stop the foreclosure. The "outstanding balance" includes amounts that would be due under the mortgage agreement if the debt under the mortgage had not been accelerated, advertising costs, posting costs and postage expenses incurred in giving notice, mileage by the most reasonable road distance for posting notices, reasonable and customary costs incurred for title and lien record searches, the necessary out-of-pocket costs incurred by the Foreclosure Commissioner for recording documents, a commission for the Foreclosure and all other costs incurred in connection with the foreclosure prior to the sale.

Date: January 8, 2026

Heide M. Myszak
Foreclosure Commissioner for the United States
Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
31440 Northwestern Hwy., Ste. 145
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

STATE OF MICHIGAN)
COUNTY OF OAKLAND) SS.

On this 8th day of January 2026, before me, a Notary Public in and for Oakland County, appeared Heide M. Myszak, Foreclosure Commissioner for the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, to me personally known and being duly sworn did say that said instrument was signed and did acknowledge the same to be her free act and deed.

Name: Karolyn A. Hanna
Notary Public, Macomb County, Michigan
Acting in Oakland County, Michigan
My Commission Expires: February 5, 2031

Drafted by and when recorded return to:
Donna Clifford-Carter (P52369)
Trott Law, PC
31440 Northwestern Hwy., Ste. 145
Farmington Hills, MI 48334 Trott # 526738L01

Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice.
Notice of foreclosure by advertisement. Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM on MARCH 18, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information.
Default has been made in the conditions of a mortgage made by Margaret L. Laird and Dianna L. Brugh, both unmarried, and Rita A. Baker and George A. Baker, married, joint tenants, to Beneficial Michigan Inc., Mortgagee, dated August 27, 2007, and recorded September 6, 2007, in Liber 964, Page 2386 Cass County Records, Michigan. Said mortgage is now held by Legacy Mortgage Asset Trust 2021-GS3, by assignment. There is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of Eighty Thousand Four Hundred Fifty-Five and 54/100 Dollars ($80,455.54).
Under the power of sale contained in said mortgage and the statute in such case made and provided, notice is hereby given that said mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at public venue at the place of holding the circuit court within Cass County, Michigan at 10:00 AM on MARCH 18, 2026.
Said premises are located in the Township of Howard, Cass County Michigan, and are described as:
BEGINNING AT A POINT ON THE EAST LINE OF SECTION 28, TOWN 7 SOUTH, RANGE 16 WEST, WHICH IS NORTH 363.00 FEET FROM THE EAST QUARTER POST OF SAID SECTION; THENCE NORTH ALONG THE EAST LINE OF SAID SECTION AND CENTERLINE OF LEET ROAD, 150.00 FEET; THENCE NORTH 89° 41' WEST, 330.00 FEET; THENCE SOUTH, 150.00 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 89° 41' EAST, 330.00 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING. RESERVING AN EASEMENT OVER THE WESTERLY 33 FEET THEREOF FOR FUTURE ROADWAY PURPOSES.
1096 Leet Rd, Niles, Michigan 49120
The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCLA §600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale.
If the property is sold at foreclosure sale, pursuant to MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damage to the property during the redemption period.
Dated: January 31, 2026
File No. 26-000257
Firm Name: Orlans Law Group PLLC
Firm Address: 1650 West Big Beaver Road, Troy MI 48084
Firm Phone Number: (248) 502.1400 (01-31)(02-21)

NOTICE OF DEFAULT AND FORECLOSURE SALE WHEREAS on 06/24/2016, a certain Home Equity Conversion Mortgage was executed by Marvin R. Williams and Marianne J. Williams, husband and wife, as mortgagor in favor of Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc. ("MERS"), solely as nominee for lender and lender`s successors and assigns, as mortgagee, and was recorded on 06/30/2016 in Liber 1107, Page 2471 Cass County Records; and WHEREAS, the Mortgage was insured by the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (the "Secretary") pursuant to the National Housing Act for the purpose of providing single family housing; and WHEREAS, the Mortgage is now owned by the Secretary, through mesne assignments as documented by an Assignment of Mortgage, dated 10/03/2024 and recorded 10/08/2024 in Liber 1251, Page 1903 Cass County Records; and WHEREAS, default has been made in the covenants and conditions of the Mortgage in that Marianne J. Williams, Marvin R. Williams is/are deceased and the property described below is not the principal residence of at least one surviving Borrower; and WHEREAS, the entire amount delinquent as of December 16, 2025 is $111,375.92; and WHEREAS, by virtue of this default, the Secretary has declared the entire amount of the indebtedness secured by the mortgage to be immediately due and payable; NOW THEREFORE, pursuant to powers vested in me by the Single Family Mortgage Foreclosure Act of 1994, 12 U.S.C. 3751 et seq., by 24 CFR part 27, subpart B, and by the Secretary's designation of me as Foreclosure Commissioner, Recorded October 7, 2024 in Liber 1251, Page 1891 Cass County Records, notice is hereby given that on March 16, 2026 at 1:00 PM local time, the real property located in the Village of Cassopolis, County of Cass, State of Michigan, the below described will be sold at public auction to the highest bidder: THE EAST 66.00 FEET OF THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBED PARCEL OF LAND: PART OF THE SOUTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION 25, TOWN 6 SOUTH, RANGE 15 WEST, VILLAGE OF CASSOPOLIS, CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN, DESCRIBED AS: BEGINNING AT A POINT ON THE WEST LINE OF SAID SECTION, WHICH IS SOUTH 692.66 FEET FROM THE WEST QUARTER CORNER OF SAID SECTION; THENCE SOUTH 89 DEGREES 26 MINUTES 10 SECONDS EAST, ALONG THE SOUTH LINE OF GRAHAM STREET AND ITS EXTENSION, 535.68 FEET, MORE OR LESS, TO THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF LOT 1 OF THE RECORDED PLAT OF "FAIR GROUND HEIGHTS ADDITION"; THENCE SOUTH 00 DEGREES 01 MINUTES 48 SECONDS WEST, ALONG THE WEST LINE OF SAID LOT 1, AND ITS EXTENSION, 149.87 FEET; THENCE NORTH 89 DEGREES 18 MINUTES 47 SECONDS WEST, 535.64 FEET, MORE OR LESS, TO THE WEST SECTION LINE; THENCE NORTH ALONG SAID WEST SECTION LINE, 148.56 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING. Commonly known as: 484 Graham St, Cassopolis, MI 49031 Tax Parcel No.: 14-041-125-022-80 The sale will be held at the back entrance, ground floor, 120 N. Broadway St., Cassopolis, MI 49031. The United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development will bid $116,454.38. There will be no proration of taxes, rents or other income or liabilities, except that the purchaser will pay, at or before closing, their pro rata share of any real estate taxes that have been paid by the Secretary to the date of the foreclosure sale. When making their bids, all bidders, except the Secretary, must submit a deposit totaling $11,645.44 [10% of the Secretary's bid] in the form of a certified check or cashier's check, made payable to the Secretary of HUD. A deposit need not accompany each oral bid. If the successful bid is oral, a deposit of $11,645.44 must be presented before the bidding is closed. The deposit is nonrefundable. The remainder of the purchase price must be delivered within 30 days of the sale or at such other time as the Secretary may determine for good cause shown, time being of the essence. This amount, like the bid deposits, must be delivered in the form of a certified or cashier's check. If the Secretary is the high bidder he/she/they need not pay the bid amount in case. The successful bidder will pay all conveying fees, all real estate and other taxes that are due on or after the delivery date of the remainder of the payments and all other costs associated with the transfer of title. At the conclusion of the sale, the deposits of the unsuccessful bidders will be returned to them. The Secretary may grant an extension of time within which to deliver the remainder of the payment. All extensions will be for 15-day increments for a fee of $500.00, paid in advance. The extension fee shall be in the form of a certified or cashier's check made payable to the Secretary of HUD. If the high bidder closes the sale prior to the expiration of any extension period, the unused portion of the extension fee shall be applied toward the amount due. If the high bidder is unable to close the sale within the required period, or within any extensions of time granted by the Secretary, the high bidder may be required to forfeit the case deposit or, at the election of the foreclosure commissioner after the consultation with the HUD representative, will be liable to HUD for any costs incurred as a result of such failure. The Commissioner may, at the direction of the HUD representative, offer the property to the second highest bidder for an amount equal to the highest price offered by that bidder. There is no right of redemption, or right of possession based upon a right of redemption, in the mortgagor or others subsequent to a foreclosure completed pursuant to the Act. Therefore, the Foreclosure Commissioner will issue a Deed to the purchaser(s) upon receipt of the entire purchase price in accordance with the terms of the sale as provided herein. HUD does not guarantee that the property will be vacant. The scheduled foreclosure sale shall be cancelled or adjourned if it is established, by documented written application of the mortgagor to the Foreclosure Commissioner not less than 3 days before the date of sale, or otherwise, that the default or defaults upon which the foreclosure is based did not exist at the time of service of this notice of default and foreclosure sale, or all amounts due under the mortgage agreement are tendered to the Foreclosure Commissioner, in the form of a certified or cashier's check payable to the Secretary of HUD, before public auction of the property is completed. Payment of the entire outstanding balance of the mortgage debt is required to the cure the default. The "outstanding balance" includes amounts that would be due under the mortgage agreement if the debt under the mortgage had not been accelerated, advertising costs, posting costs and postage expenses incurred in giving notice, mileage by the most reasonable road distance for posting notices, reasonable and customary costs incurred for title and lien record searches, the necessary out-of-pocket costs incurred by the Foreclosure Commissioner for recorded documents, a commission for the Foreclosure and all other costs incurred in connection with the foreclosure prior to sale. Tender of payment be certified or cashier's check or applicable for cancellation of the foreclosure sale shall be submitted to the address of the Foreclosure Commissioner provided below. Date: 01/07/2026 Neil Sherman Foreclosure Commissioner for the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development 23938 Research Dr Suite 300 Farmington Hills, MI 48335 248.539.7400 STATE OF MICHIGAN COUNTY OF OAKLAND ss. On this 01/07/2026, before me, a Notary Public in and for said County of Oakland, came Neil Sherman of Schneiderman & Sherman P.C., the Foreclosure Commissioner, known to me to be the individual described in and who executed the above conveyance, and who acknowledged that he/she executed the same to be his/her free act and deed as such. Christina Hedke, Notary Public Wayne County, Michigan My Commission Expires: 06/21/2031 Acting in Oakland County, Michigan Drafted by and when recorded return to: Erica Nichols (P80833) Schneiderman & Sherman P.C. 23938 Research Dr Suite 300 Farmington Hills, MI 48335 248.539.7400 25-003503-1

1582189
(01-17)(01-31)

OUTDOORS

Submitting hunting or fishing photos

Have a behemoth buck, a tremendous turkey or super-sized salmon? Please submit photos to sports@TheHP.com.

Your photo must be in focus, all persons in the photo must be identified, and the general location of the hunt must be provided (for example, 10-point buck shot in Benton Township, black bear shot near Munising, Mich., etc.)

A collaborative effort to protect Michigan's bats

By AILEEN KEMME
Michigan DNR

Photo courtesy of Keweenaw Bay Indian Community

The silver-haired bat, shown here being held by a biologist, is one of four bat species that hibernate in caves and abandoned mine shafts throughout Michigan's Keweenaw region.

Jutting out into Lake Superior is the Keweenaw Peninsula, home to Michigan's Copper Country.

This is where the earliest known metalworking in North America originated, with objects crafted by Indigenous peoples from Keweenaw copper becoming so prized that they have been discovered in archaeological sites throughout North America.

European settlers also established mining operations in the same region and made Michigan into the world's leading copper producer by the early 20th century.

While virtually all the mining operations in the area have shuttered since then, the mines are not empty. The Keweenaw region is home to seven of Michigan's nine bat species, with many of the bats calling the abandoned mines home.

Three of the Keweenaw's bat species migrate south for the winter, with some, like the hoary bat, traveling as far as Central America before returning to their spring and summertime breeding grounds in North America.

The remaining four species spend their winters hibernating deep within caves and abandoned mine shafts throughout the region. Approximately 90 percent of Michigan's hibernating bats overwinter in the Upper Peninsula, with these hibernation sites – called hibernacula – housing anywhere from a few individuals to tens of thousands.

While their erratic flight patterns and nocturnal behavior cause some people to fear them, bats play a vital role in Michigan's ecosystem and economy.

A single bat can consume thousands of insects in one night, including disease-carrying mosquitoes and crop-damaging pests.

By naturally controlling insect populations, bats reduce the need for pesticides, with some studies estimating they save U.S. farmers more than $3 billion per year.

But Michigan's ecologically and economically important bat populations are facing serious challenges, including habitat loss and becoming infected with white-nose syndrome.

White-nose syndrome, a deadly fungal disease, has eliminated roughly 90 percent of the state's bats. Primarily affecting them while hibernating, the disease causes infected bats to awaken prematurely and rapidly deplete their fat reserves before they ultimately starve to death.

Entire colonies can be lost within a few years because the fungus spreads from cave to cave and from bat to bat through social grooming and close contact.

In response to the rapid decline of Michigan's bat population, the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community organized a collaborative research effort known as the Bat Blitz in 2024.

Made possible through federal funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the goal of the Bat Blitz was simple: to build skills for bat conservation entities by training together and sharing expertise across state, federal and tribal agencies.

Over the course of three nights, biologists from the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community's Natural Resource Department were joined by partners from the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Together, the team used mist nets – fine mesh nets resembling volleyball nets – to safely capture bats as they flew low over creeks and along backcountry roads in search of prey.

The biologists closely monitored the nets throughout the night, and once captured, the bats were carefully removed, examined and documented before being released unharmed.

Because Michigan is home to over 500 vertebrate wildlife species, this type of cross-agency training is crucial.

While it is common for environmental agencies in Michigan to have someone on staff who specializes in wildlife, it is rare to have someone with extensive experience with bats. And with experts estimating that 52 percent of bat species in North America are at risk of severe population declines in the next 15 years, time is important.

"It's always great when you get together with an open mind and share techniques and knowledge," said DNR biologist and 2025 Bat Blitz attendee John DePue, who specializes in bats. "While all our biologists are experienced with wildlife, some are just starting in the bat world and don't have a lot of hands-on experience. Those of us who do are happy to teach. We're passionate about bats, and we enjoy sharing our tools and techniques with others."

Joining DePue at the Blitz was Kyle Seppanen, a wildlife researcher with the KBIC's Natural Resource Department, who helped host the event.

"It takes a lot of knowledge and skill to handle a bat safely without injuring it," Seppanen said. "You need repetition to become proficient, so having experienced handlers on-site helps keep both people and bats safe."

Three bat species were captured during the most recent Bat Blitz, including a little brown bat that was fitted with a small tracking transmitter before release.

These tiny radio transmitters are temporarily attached using a safe adhesive, allowing researchers to track the bats' movements. Scientists use antennas like the Motus Wildlife Tracking System to detect the signals for short periods of time, as the transmitters are designed to fall off after a few weeks. This data helps researchers better understand habitat threats and identify migration and roosting areas.

The data collected through the Blitz will also support field-based training for dog detection teams and advance efforts to locate and protect bat roosts on lands managed by the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians in Emmet County.

A bat roost is any place a bat uses for shelter and protection from predators. Common roosting sites include caves, hollow trees and human-made structures such as attics or mines.

Bats often have multiple habitats for hibernation and breeding. Protecting maternity roosts is especially critical for the survival of Michigan's bat populations, and knowing their location helps conservation efforts.

"Even though bats are sometimes referred to as 'mice with wings,' they are very different from mice," said Jenny Wong of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who also attended the Bat Blitz. "Rodents can produce dozens of litters a year, resulting in hundreds of offspring. Most of Michigan's bat species give birth to just one pup annually. Even though some species can live 30 to 40 years, their low reproductive rate means every individual matters when it comes to rebuilding populations."

Anyone can help protect Michigan's bats. Simple actions include reducing pesticide use, installing bat houses and planting night-blooming flowers that attract moths, which serve as a food source for many bat species.

You can also assist the DNR and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory at Michigan State University by reporting bat roosts through the Roost Survey Form on the MNFI website.

Sarett Nature Center

Sarett Nature Stewards: 2-4 p.m. each Wednesday. This program is a way to experience Sarett in a whole different way. By being a nature steward you are helping Sarett but you also gain a sense of well-being. Sarett's crew will teach you many different skills such as collecting viable seeds for future planting, how to identify invasive species from native ones, removing invasive plants, and more. For ages 10 and older.

Winter Bird Outing: 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Feb. 7. Join Sarett for a winter bird outing to where the birds are – it could be Allegan State Game Area for eagle watching or to Muskegon for a variety of birds. Plan to make a day of it. Bring money for lunch which will be at a restaurant near the birding site. Dress for the weather. Call (269) 927-4832 to register. Members $15, non-members $18.

Email info for Get Outdoors to sports@TheHP.com, or call 429-1294 by Monday.

With bear encounters declining in BWCAW region, officials extend food storage order

By BOB TIMMONS
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

MINNEAPOLIS — Managers of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness say they will extend stricter food storage requirements for visitors, noting the rules have reduced encounters with black bears over the last two years.

The order was set to expire this spring, but now will be enforced for another five years, the U.S. Forest Service announced Thursday, Jan. 15.

Planning for another season of canoe camping, when hundreds of thousands of people visit the wilderness, is underway for many Minnesotans and out-of-state residents. Visitors can begin booking reservations Jan. 28 for the quota season, which runs May 1 through Sept. 30.

"Continuing the order is the most effective and responsible path forward for protecting both visitors and the wilderness's black bear population," said the agency in an official document released to explain the reasoning behind the decision.

In 2024, the Forest Service stiffened the rules for storing food and other "smellables" like garbage, soap and toothpaste, citing increased interactions between humans and bear sows and their cubs in search of food.

While many canoe campers already hang food packs from trees and out of reach of wildlife, the Forest Service's order was more exacting: Visitors must hang food at least 12 feet above the ground and 6 feet out from a tree trunk or store it in a specially certified grizzly bear-proof container. Many of the common polyethylene blue barrels aren't on the approved list.

The order was unprecedented. The agency, which oversees the Superior National Forest, has had temporary rules in limited areas in past years. The 2024 requirements were wilderness-wide for the first time. The agency said documented bear encounters were on the rise, with 58 cases per year, on average, between 2021 and 2023.

Visitors reported fewer than 10 brushes with bears after the 2024 season, Forest Service spokesperson Joy VanDrie said after the first year of the order.

Over the last two seasons, there has been a "sharp decrease in reported conflicts, justifying the continuation and robust enforcement of this mandate," the Forest Service added in the Jan. 15 release.

Changing behavior

The agency has fielded questions from visitors, and others have expressed concerns on social media platforms about the dearth of campsites with suitable trees to comply with the rules. The Forest Service said its rangers consider campsite conditions when enforcing the order.

A public FAQ document from the agency stated that requests to set up food storage lockers aren't realistic and would be "cost prohibitive." There are almost 2,000 campsites across the million-acre BWCAW.

The agency also has emphasized educating the public about storing food, directing wilderness visitors to online instruction and best practices on its website and through how-to videos on YouTube.

Generally, visitors complied with the order, the agency said. Citations were low and focused on blatant or repeated violations. The fine is $50.

The order applies April 1 through Nov. 30, when bears are most active.

A few longtime wilderness outfitters agreed that the order has made an impact.

Ginny Nelson, of Spirit of the Wilderness in Ely, said she has been renting out more approved storage canisters and bags, like Ursacks.

"In the past few years, our guests have had less bear encounters," Nelson told the Minnesota Star Tribune. "There is a good possibility that the food storage order is the reason. People have always been asked to keep a clean campsite and not feed the wildlife."

Dave Seaton, of Hungry Jack Outfitters, said he is in "bear central" off the Gunflint Trail. Hungry Jack advises customers to never leave their food alone in any circumstance. He said the education campaign by outfitters and the agency, coupled with the order, is sinking in.

Massachusetts looks to expand deer hunting, including on Sunday

By RICK SOBEY
Boston Herald (TNS)

BOSTON — Will Sundays no longer be peaceful days of rest for deer in Massachusetts?

State wildlife officials are looking into expanding deer hunting opportunities, as they gather public input on Sunday hunting, crossbow hunting and minimum setback distances for hunting.

Massachusetts is one of only two states with an outright ban on Sunday hunting. The Sunday hunting prohibition originated in the 19th century – over 200 years ago.

"Hunting has always been woven into Massachusetts' history – supporting families, boosting local economies and helping keep our deer populations healthy," Gov. Maura Healey said in a statement.

"Expanding opportunities for hunters will carry that tradition forward while protecting public health and ensuring we're maintaining balance in our wildlife populations," the governor added.

In addition to the Sunday hunting ban, crossbows are prohibited for hunting – except for hunters with a permanent disability.

Crossbows are generally more accessible than traditional and compound bows because they require less physical strength to use.

Modern archery equipment, including crossbows, have built-in safety features that boost reliability and safe use in the field, wildlife officials said. In recent years, several New England states have changed laws to allow crossbows for deer hunting.

When it comes to setback limits, Massachusetts rules ban hunting within 500 feet of a dwelling/building in use or within 150 feet of a road. Other states in the Northeast have less restrictive setbacks for archery hunting than the Bay State.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) will soon hold public listening sessions on these opportunities to expand hunting access.

"We encourage the public to take part in these upcoming listening sessions and share their perspectives about Sunday hunting, hunting with a crossbow, and opening additional areas," said Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Tom O'Shea.

"By expanding access, we can ensure that people have more opportunities to participate in this tradition, connect with the outdoors and each other, and put food on the table," O'Shea added.

Following the listening sessions, MassWildlife will evaluate public input and anticipated wildlife management impacts to inform its recommendations.

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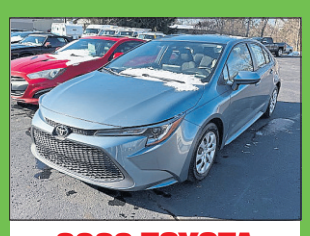

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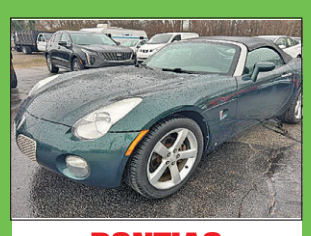

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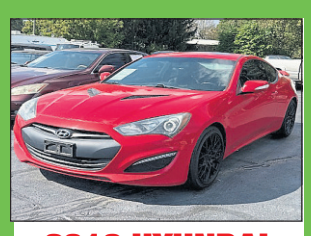

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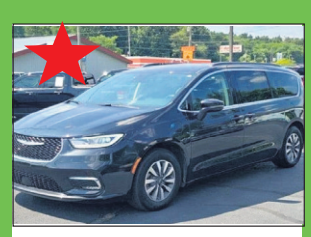

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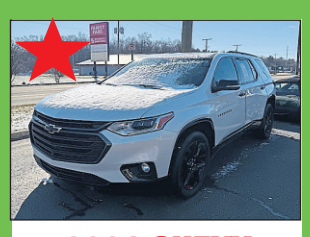

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